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Continued rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres has now entered a new phase. Recognizing current budgetary and political factors, the Department of Public Information has adopted a new strategic approach that combines the realignment of resources, an expansion in the use of information and communication technologies and the building of new partnerships. The present report, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 60/109 B of 8 December 2005, outlines the steps taken by the Department to further rationalize the network of United Nations information centres, thereby strengthening its information presence at the national level and within regions and subregions.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 60/109 B of 8 December 2005, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to make proposals relating to the further rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres and to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-eighth session. It furthermore recognized that the network should continue to enhance its impact and activities, including through strategic communications support, especially in developing countries, and called upon the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on the implementation of that approach. The present report addresses the issues raised and actions requested in the above-mentioned resolution with regard to the work of United Nations information centres.

2. The plan for the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres, first presented for the consideration of the General Assembly in 2002, envisaged the creation of a regional hub in Western Europe with the objective of applying this initiative in other regions, in consultation with Member States, where it would strengthen the flow and exchange of information to target audiences around the world. As a first step, the Department of Public Information closed the existing nine information centres in Western Europe on 31 December 2003 and, on 1 January 2004, established a regional United Nations information centre in Brussels. In his report to the Committee on Information in 2005 on the further rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2005/3), the Secretary-General presented the initial assessment of the implementation of his rationalization plan. In it, the Secretary-General explained the implications of recent reductions in the operating budget of the information centres and concluded that the resources required for the further establishment of fully functional regional information centres were currently not available. In the light of those considerations, the Secretary-General introduced new ideas for the further rationalization of the centres within the resources available to the Department. At the core of those proposals was the adoption of a more strategic approach that emphasized a realignment of resources, the use of new technologies and the expansion of partnerships. The objective of the recalibrated plan was to make optimal use of the available resources in order to achieve a greater overall impact.

3. The present report examines the impact of those changes on the operation of the network of United Nations information centres and introduces additional thoughts on ways to further the rationalization process.

II. Status of further rationalization: adopting a strategic approach

4. The ongoing process of rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres is contingent upon the availability of both staff and financial resources allocated to the Department. The Department's strategic communications objectives, established on the basis of the decisions of intergovernmental bodies and the resulting programmatic priorities of the Organization, have also influenced the process. The renewed emphasis on communications activities at the field level as an integral part of the Department's overall communications planning, aimed at

generating greater public understanding of and support for the work of the Organization, has guided the development of the new operational model.

A. Realignment of resources

5. As reported in the 2005 report of the Secretary-General on the further rationalization of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2005/3), the Department, working within the existing budgetary constraints, has sought to strengthen its information presence in major media hubs, while giving the centres in those locations a greater coordinating role at the regional level. Following the closure of the United Nations information centres in Western Europe, the Department was able to reallocate three Director-level posts to centres located in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria. Directors have been appointed to two of those centres, with the third appointment expected to be made shortly. In strengthening the leadership of those centres, the Department has also assigned them greater regional responsibilities, requiring them to work strategically with centres in neighbouring countries to develop and implement communications plans to promote United Nations priority issues in a way that would have special resonance in the region. By leveraging the relative strengths of the centres in terms of outreach and information production and also by providing them with additional information technology support, these offices have now been positioned to play an important role in enhancing the impact of the activities of the smaller centres in that region. The Department has also allocated an additional Professional post and an Information Systems Assistant (or Webmaster) post to the three information centres, for which recruitment is under way.

6. The Department has also made tangible progress towards securing either rent-free or subsidized premises for a number of information centres. At present, 44 centres operate from rent-free premises provided by the local authorities or the Governments of their host countries. The United Nations Information Centre in Sydney, Australia, is currently in the process of moving to Canberra, where an extrabudgetary contribution by the host Government will cover the cost of the rental of its premises. Through the savings thus generated, it will now be possible to enhance the centre's public information outreach and activities in the South Pacific. Likewise, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has pledged to make an extrabudgetary contribution, starting in 2006, to cover the cost of the rental of the premises for the United Nations Information Centre in Port of Spain. Again, the resultant savings will be used by the centre's staff for communications outreach and activities in the Caribbean region. The Department has contacted eight other host Governments of United Nations information centres in locations where the cost of the rental and/or maintenance of premises consumes a large part of the centres' allocation of operational funds. It is hoped that as a result, the Department will be able either to secure rent-free premises or to appropriate extrabudgetary contributions to cover that expenditure, applying the resultant savings to enhance the programmatic activities of the centres.

B. Upgrading the use of information and communication technologies

7. The enhanced use of information and communication technologies is essential to strengthening the impact of the United Nations information centres. Owing to

budgetary constraints, the Department has not been able to undertake the regular replacement of computers and other information and communication technologies equipment in its field offices since 2001, except in emergencies. As a result, the equipment in many centres is out of date, even obsolete. Towards the end of the biennium 2004-2005, the Department undertook a limited equipment replacement exercise in 27 centres, which included new computers, photocopiers, printers and video projectors. The exercise was made possible largely through realignment of resources made in the context of the second performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. Arrangements are also under way to provide some information centres with recording devices, most of them used or from United Nations Radio stock, to enable them to produce radio programmes more effectively at the local level, and to contribute them to United Nations Radio's internationally distributed programmes.

8. The development of websites in local languages remains a priority for the Department as a means of reaching local constituencies with up-to-date information. At present, 47 United Nations information centres, services and offices maintain websites in 5 official and 26 unofficial languages. The unequal pace of website development has largely been the result of local connectivity problems and the lack of appropriate locally available skills. Staff training in information technology will continue to be a priority, although the funding available for such training continues to fall short of the actual needs. To alleviate this situation, in part, the Department is currently working with the Office of Human Resources Management to extend to field staff online training opportunities that are currently available to staff deployed in headquarters locations.

9. As indicated in paragraph 5 of the present report, efforts to upgrade the information technology skills of staff at United Nations information centres are being supplemented by the redeployment of local-level posts to centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria to make those posts available for Webmasters and to assist the centres in the surrounding region in website development and maintenance. Those efforts are complementing the project already undertaken by the technical staff in the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe in Brussels to develop a content management system that will enable local staff in the field to update the information on their own sites easily by using a user-friendly template. A new server has recently been provided to upgrade the communication facilities of the Brussels office. The new server will enable the Centre to host the sites of many field offices, particularly those in Africa, thus ensuring reliable connectivity independent of communications constraints currently existing in some field locations.

10. The Department has also made considerable strides in improving the system of internal communications using the latest developments in information technology. Those efforts have strengthened the two-way flow of information between Headquarters and the field and has enabled field offices to communicate more easily with each other. During the first quarter of 2006, most of the 63 field offices were connected to iSeek, the Secretariat's new Intranet-based home page for internal communications, which is managed by the Internal Communications Unit of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, in the Department of Public Information. Field staff now have access to all the online internal information resources that had previously been available only to staff in headquarters locations. That material includes documents archived in the Official Document System, administrative issuances, various alerts

and online training opportunities available through the Office of Human Resources Management. In addition, in 2005, the Department developed StratCom, an internal strategic communications network on the Internet, updated daily, to provide all the United Nations information centres, services and offices with a consolidated database containing a wealth of information relating to the Department's current programmatic, operational and administrative issues. That internal communication resource has facilitated the flow of information and provides an interactive forum for the ongoing discussion and sharing of best practices among colleagues in the field. Regional chat rooms are a popular feature of this site. They enable Department field staff to maintain an ongoing daily dialogue on common issues and concerns, to discuss areas of cooperation and to explore ways and means of developing more effective communications activities, particularly at the regional and subregional levels or in areas where linguistic commonalities exist. This innovation has not only brought the field staff of the Department closer, but is also helping them work more efficiently.

11. Advances in information and communication technologies are also being tapped to modernize the libraries of United Nations information centres. The libraries remain an invaluable local resource, offering key audiences and constituencies reliable access to United Nations information and expert reference assistance. Using electronic resources and training modules developed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the reference collections have been modernized. Access to electronically available information is being maximized, ensuring that the Department's small field libraries are able to join the move from "collections to connections", emulating a similar transformation of libraries in headquarters locations. Moreover, using electronically available training materials, the reference staff in field locations are now able to offer training to local constituencies in the use of United Nations reference materials available on the Internet. Efforts are also continuing, wherever feasible, to consolidate all locally available reference collections of the United Nations country team into a single reference library, thus maximizing limited resources and improving access to United Nations information by local users.

C. Building partnerships

12. In 2005, the Department made considerable progress in developing and refining its new strategic operating model at the field level. The participation and contribution of Department field staff have been essential elements in this process. In June 2005, a strategic communications workshop for the information staff from the centres located in sub-Saharan Africa was held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, with funding from the Better World Fund. Several Resident Coordinators who concurrently serve as Directors or Acting Directors of United Nations information centres in sub-Saharan Africa also participated in the meeting. Three Directors of sub-Saharan United Nations information centres who were deployed at that time as heads of information of peace missions, or who had recently served in that capacity, also participated in the meeting. Their input enabled the workshop to develop ideas on the ways in which United Nations information centres could develop better collaborative communications strategies and activities with two major partners: United Nations country teams and United Nations peace missions. For example, efforts are under way to take advantage of the synergies available

through the presence of peacekeeping missions currently deployed in Africa, to develop joint communications activities aimed, in particular, at troop-contributing countries.

13. The workshop also provided a platform to discuss other elements of the new operating model and establish parameters for future cooperation among the centres located in sub-Saharan Africa. Essential to the new method of work at the regional and subregional levels is ongoing daily contact and dialogue among United Nations information centres to discuss emerging priorities, the best ways of addressing urgent communications issues and possible joint activities. Developing the theme further, the centres discussed specific ways they might share related tasks, such as translation of documents and information materials, preparation of original materials for web posting in local languages, consolidated outreach to regional media and ways to maximize their joint expertise and experience.

14. The new strategic operating model was further discussed and refined at a global strategic communications workshop held at Headquarters in December 2005, with the participation of information staff from 44 United Nations information centres, services and offices. They met, together with the Headquarters-based communications staff of the Department, for briefings and discussions on the strategic priorities and emerging communications issues of the Organization in follow-up to the 2005 World Summit. The Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and senior officials of the Organization participated in discussions moderated by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. The workshop was a unique opportunity for field and Headquarters staff to meet with their counterparts, to share and discuss common issues and concerns, and to establish a firm basis for their future work relationships, both within their respective regions and subregions and with Headquarters.

15. Resources permitting, particularly from extrabudgetary sources, the Department intends to organize similar strategic communications training workshops for information staff based in other regions. Likewise, subject to the identification of appropriate funding, similar group training opportunities will be made available for other field staff of the Department, including Reference Assistants and Administrative Assistants, to ensure that all field staff are regularly provided the opportunity to develop their skills, taking full advantage of the latest advancements in information and office technology.

16. A good example of the new strategic approach in the work of the United Nations information centres can be seen in the enhanced role of the United Nations Information Service in Vienna, which has assumed a greater role in coordinating its work with that of the United Nations information centres in Bucharest, Prague and Warsaw, where National Information Officers are the most senior staff. As part of an ongoing consultative process among the information staff of the Department in that subregion, and taking advantage of the geographical proximity of the two locations, the National Information Officer and the Reference Assistant from the United Nations Information Centre in Prague met with colleagues from the United Nations Information Centre in Vienna to familiarize themselves with the working methods of that office and to review areas of future cooperation and coordination. Furthermore, to compensate for its current staffing weaknesses, the United Nations Information Service in Vienna has identified local "stringers" in Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia

to provide communications support for its efforts in those countries in local languages, on an "as needed" basis.

17. The Department has made progress in enhancing the coordination of communications efforts at the country level through closer cooperation and coordination with the United Nations country teams, particularly in developing countries. Building on discussions and decisions made by the United Nations Communications Group during its annual meeting at the level of principals held in May 2005 in Geneva, efforts have continued to establish local United Nations communications groups in all field locations where they may not have been operational. Their presence will enhance joint communications efforts and ensure that all the work of the United Nations is promoted more coherently and visibly at the country level. In most instances, the United Nations information centre has taken a leadership role in the process, establishing the Department's field office as the communications arm of the United Nations country team, by virtue of its knowledge of the local media and other key constituencies and its ability to address local partners in their own language.

III. Communications campaigns: benefiting from a new approach

18. The new, more strategic approach to the Department's field work was tested in the preparation and implementation of communications strategies to promote a number of key activities of the Organization in 2005, in particular the 2005 World Summit and the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis in November 2005. The contribution made by the United Nations information centres, services and offices had a major impact on the success of the Department's public information efforts to promote those events.

19. The Department's offices in the field were essential players in the media campaign undertaken to promote the objectives of the 2005 World Summit and the key issues discussed by world leaders at the Summit. The media outreach capacity and expertise of the United Nations information centres was instrumental in reaching the public at the national level. For example, the centres translated and placed editorials by the Secretary-General and other senior officials in the local media. One such editorial by the Secretary-General, entitled "A glass at least half full", was placed by United Nations information centres in 55 major newspapers in 44 countries and in 22 languages. The centres also organized a number of well-attended national media briefings given by senior United Nations officials who addressed the journalists through videoconferencing facilities from Headquarters or other remote locations. Field staff utilized the strategic guidance regularly provided from Headquarters to keep local media abreast of developments leading up to the Summit. A media analysis of coverage of the Summit has shown that the proactive interaction between United Nations officials or spokespersons and the media helped generate more positive coverage than otherwise would have been the case. United Nations information centre staff also organized and moderated live discussions and radio and television panel discussions, with the participation of key United Nations country team officials, Government representatives and other local partners on a variety of issues to be addressed at the Summit. In addition, key documents and information materials were made available on centre websites in local languages.

20. To promote the World Summit on the Information Society, selected United Nations information centres in Africa undertook an innovative educational outreach programme. Organized by the Department's Global Teaching and Learning Project, it demonstrated how low-cost technology could help bridge the digital divide, with a special focus on Africa. High-school students gathered at the United Nations information centres in Nairobi and Yaoundé participated in a live video web chat with students in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and France. The event took place at the Summit site in Tunis, in front of a live audience that included local Tunisian students. The participants discussed challenges girls face at high school. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information moderated the discussion, and Mrs. Nane Annan also took part. Using the same live web-based video technology, the Under-Secretary-General discussed, with teachers gathered at the information centres in Bujumbura, Dakar, Nairobi, Ouagadougou, Pretoria and Yaoundé, how information and communication technologies and cultural diversity could help enhance education in Africa. Local media covered those activities widely, which provided an excellent example of how easily today's technology can bring together remotely located constituencies to exchange experiences and create greater understanding. Both events have sparked interest among the participants in organizing more interactions using live video chats. This low-cost technology has the potential of opening new avenues of communication for field offices in a way that is more affordable and flexible than videoconferencing.

21. Additional information on the activities of United Nations information centres in support of the Department's thematic communications campaigns is provided in the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2006/5).

IV. Rationalization: the next steps

22. In continuing with the further rationalization of the United Nations information centres, the Department will expedite the appointment and placement of staff in several key positions. The newly appointed Director in Cairo is providing strategic communications support and guidance to the centres in the Middle East and North Africa and will lead communications efforts at the regional level. The Directors in Mexico City and Pretoria will assume the leading role in developing their respective regional models of work, building on the specific media environments in their regions to improve the impact of the Department's communications efforts at the field level. As noted earlier, each of the three centres will also be strengthened through the redeployment of a post of Information Officer at the P-4 level to enhance communications efforts within the region. A post of Webmaster will also be deployed to each of these centres to assist in developing the information and communication technologies capacity of the Department's field offices in their respective regions.

23. While uniquely qualified to take a leadership role within the country team on communications matters, some information staff of the United Nations information centres have not been able to assume that function as a result of their low grade level within the Organization. Only 20 of 54 United Nations information centres are headed by internationally recruited staff of the Department. Therefore, National Information Officers, with their intimate knowledge of the local environment,

communications issues and local languages, are the pillars of the Department's communications objectives at the country level. Currently, the Department has only 39 National Officer posts, which means that in nine locations, the information officer of the United Nations information centre performs those functions at a lower grade level. To remedy this situation, which has persisted for a number of years, the Department has been seeking the conversion of nine local-level posts to the National Officer category, an objective that it intends to pursue during the next budgetary exercise.

24. In a separate process, the Department has been working with the Office of Human Resources Management to secure the classification of some National Officer posts at the NO-C level, which will have no additional budgetary implications. This would help to secure a career path for key national staff and retain those top performing local information professionals, who often seek positions with other organizations within country teams that have higher-level national officer grades. At this stage, the Office of Human Resources Management has agreed in principle to make this classification available to the Department on a case-by-case basis, for the promotion of National Information Officers who are the most senior staff of the Department at a given location. The Department expects to proceed during 2006 with the implementation of the promotion exercise for selected staff.

25. The Department considers it essential to reallocate some regular budget resources for a limited amount of travel by key staff, particularly in those centres that have broader regional outreach responsibilities. This would enable them to visit locations across their region and to raise the Organization's visibility among key constituencies, such as the media and civil society. The Department would continue to support the increased use by United Nations information centres of StratCom and of such information and communication technologies as teleconferencing, webcasting and other "virtual" means of communications. Despite the increased reliance on the new means of communication with key audiences, there remains a need for Department staff to travel to take part in communications programmes outside the city or country where the centre is located. This is especially true for centres that are covering more than one country. The Department is committed to finding creative ways of raising travel funds, such as from the organizers of events United Nations information centre staff are invited to address. It will also continue to consult with Member States hosting centres in locations where the expenditure for the rental and/or maintenance of the premises continues to consume a large proportion of the centre's operational funds, with a view to finding solutions that would free resources for outreach activities, including travel.

26. The Department remains open to the proposal of the Government of Angola and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries with regard to the possibility of opening a United Nations information centre in Luanda to cover Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. While the Department appreciates the offer by the Government to provide rent-free premises for such a centre, it is not in a position to cover the considerable one-time and ongoing operational costs of an additional office or to identify the local-level posts needed for that purpose from within existing resources. In fact, an analysis of staff and budgetary resources has revealed that, under the current level of resources available to the Department, such an undertaking would be possible only through the closing of one or more currently operating United Nations information centres.

27. At the same time, the Department continues to make every effort to ensure that it regularly provides its constituencies and audiences in Portuguese-speaking developing countries with information products in that language. The Desk for Portugal in the United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels prepares and circulates translations into Portuguese of key United Nations documents and the Department's information materials, both electronically and in hard copy, to all United Nations offices in Portuguese-speaking countries. It recently arranged for the dissemination of the Portuguese version of the very popular publication "Sixty ways the United Nations makes a difference", produced in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization. Audiences in Portuguese-speaking countries are frequent visitors to the Portuguese website of the United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels, where new information is posted daily and accessed by lusophone users on a regular basis. Also, the Desk maintains ongoing cooperation with *Africa Hoje*, issued in Lisbon and read by key constituencies in Portuguese-speaking African countries. This magazine publishes United Nations feature articles and original stories about the Organization's work written specifically for the publication. United Nations Radio has also established a working relationship with national broadcasters in the Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, providing them with radio programming in Portuguese on a regular basis.

V. The United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe: lessons learned

28. The Regional United Nations Information Centre for Western Europe (RUNIC), in Brussels, was renamed the United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) in late 2005 to increase its visibility in the electronic media, since many web search engines detect the United Nations connection only when those words appear at the start of the name. The Centre completed its first operational year in its permanent premises in July 2005. At the end of that period, an initial evaluation of its experience, programmatic activities and operations was undertaken by the Department with a view to identifying lessons learned that could be used to strengthen its performance and, where necessary, improve its services. That evaluation, conducted with the expert assistance of a communications consultant with extensive knowledge about the operation of information centres in Europe and the media environment in the region, identified the strengths and weaknesses of the Centre as a regional hub and suggested ways to strengthen it further. The major recommendations have already been put into effect by the Department and the new management of the Centre.

29. The thrust of the concept to establish a regional hub for Western Europe was to rationalize and streamline information activities and to create a critical mass to perform those activities more efficiently, while at the same time allowing for synergies in the hub and ensuring better coordinated messages. The Centre was also to serve as the principal point of access in the region to United Nations material and data, and to articulate its programmes in the countries served around a common list of United Nations priorities to be conveyed strategically through key intermediaries for maximum impact. However, in 2005 the Centre had not yet fully adjusted to this new regional approach. It was still grappling with the challenges of a dramatic change in the established patterns of doing business and of serving the media and civil society in a large and distant geographical area from a centralized location. The

physical distance from their key local partners was seen by some staff at the Centre as a major obstacle in maintaining the necessary rapport with the media and civil society, in taking part in important media events and in developing new partnerships. Though new methods of functioning, in particular by electronic and telephonic means, had been envisaged, this physical distance from their target audiences had led in some cases to a decline in contacts and activities and had reduced the visibility of the United Nations in the countries concerned. As a result, the Centre has yet to achieve the visibility and standing that had been hoped for in the countries it serves. This problem was exacerbated by the lack of adequate travel funds, which made frequent visits impossible. In order to maintain vital contacts between the desk officers and their target audiences, resources are being reallocated to permit adequate travel funds to be made available to ensure regular visits to the countries covered. Some desk officers have been able to mobilize travel funds from Governments or the organizers of the events they have been invited to support, such as non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. Financial and other support from Governments also enabled the Centre to produce information materials and products in various European languages. The Centre will continue to rely on those vital extrabudgetary contributions to supplement the resources allocated to it from the regular programme budget. Efforts to energize the regional United Nations Associations in European countries to serve as civil society partners of the Centre have also made uneven progress, despite the cooperation of the World Federation of United Nations Associations. Those efforts will increase in the coming year.

30. A regional communications strategy outlining the longer-term communications objectives in the region is being elaborated, taking into consideration the existing capacities, opportunities and limitations of the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. The strategy will identify the key communications priorities and will develop common messages to be disseminated by the Centre to its target audiences in the countries it serves. This will enable a common regional approach, placing special emphasis on the "European angle" in distributing United Nations messages, which was initially lacking in the Centre's operation. New staff members of the regional centre will undergo basic induction training by the Department to gain insight into the ways the Department operates and to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the Department of Public Information team. The recently appointed Director of the Centre has already undergone such training. Three new desk officers took part in a similar week-long orientation programme at United Nations Headquarters at the end of February 2006. The Department is also expanding its training and orientation programmes to new staff from other information centres. For example, the new Director of the United Nations information centre in Tokyo will be among the first to participate in such a programme during the first half of 2006.

31. The presence in Brussels of the headquarters of the European Commission and of the Council of the European Union were important elements in the decision to establish the regional centre in that city. Relations with the European Union and its institutions rank very high on the agenda of the Centre. A first step in that direction was the creation of a special web page in English and French on relations between the European Union and the United Nations. A staff member familiar with key players in the European Union was assigned to maintain working level contacts with that institution. To further strengthen those ties, closer and regular contacts are being established at the management level with the three European institutions (the

European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament) to identify possible areas of cooperation, including joint missions by journalists to United Nations projects financed by the European Union. All staff of the Centre are being encouraged to maintain contacts with senior officials of their target countries and their respective support staff. In addition, the Centre is developing a new strategic communications approach that will better utilize common synergies between the United Nations, the European Union institutions and other organizations based in Brussels. Those efforts are focusing on the promotion of joint activities and issues of common concern. In January, for example, the Centre organized the first in a series of press briefings on human rights issues, bringing together a United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for Human Rights of the European Union. Visits of high-level United Nations officials offer another opportunity for collaboration. During the January visit of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, a successful press conference was organized for him and his counterpart in the European Union. The Centre is also developing a much closer working relationship with the large international press corps in Brussels, which should benefit the Organization by increasing its visibility in major European media.

32. The Department has also taken a number of additional steps to foster closer coordination between the Centre and the Department of Public Information at Headquarters and between the Centre and other Department field offices in the European region. The Department is providing the Centre with guidance in management and communications, integrating outreach efforts with the overall programmatic activities of the Department. To further improve the impact of the Department's outreach efforts in Europe, the United Nations information services in Geneva and Vienna and the United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels are discussing ways they can better coordinate their communications efforts.

33. Cooperation with United Nations agencies based in Brussels has also been strengthened by the recent establishment of a communications group, which will help develop a more cohesive, proactive and cost-effective approach to communications efforts. The group has agreed that the Centre should be the lead office for most public information activities of the United Nations family in Brussels, and the Centre's meeting room will be the venue for joint press briefings, report launches and similar media activities. The Centre's desk officers also act as communications focal points for specific United Nations priority thematic issues important in Europe, such as human rights and peacekeeping, coordinating activities with United Nations agencies in Brussels and with the Department at Headquarters. The Centre's focal point on human rights has established a "friends of human rights in Europe" group which includes Brussels-based representatives from the European Union, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and others that have an interest in the issue. The group meets regularly to develop a coherent and unified approach to promoting human rights issues in Europe. The new management of the Centre, which includes the Director and Deputy Director, both appointed in the second half of 2005, will institute additional measures to improve its programmatic and operational capacity and effectiveness.

VI. Conclusion

34. The decision by the Department of Public Information to recalibrate its rationalization plan was largely influenced by emerging political and financial realities. The adjustments subsequently made were also driven by new strategic considerations. The advances made in the area of information and communication technologies now offer new opportunities for providing quick, effective and meaningful service to a very large audience. To take advantage of those opportunities, the Department has made a deliberate decision to invest more in information and communication technologies. It has also expanded its operational base by building new partnerships with Governments, civil society and the private sector. In addition, to make the best use of its limited financial resources, it has bolstered its information presence in key locations by reallocating resources and strengthening professional staffing. The overall objective has been to provide a structure and support base that enables better and more efficient service to a larger audience.

35. The United Nations stories are global, but every global story has resonance in a local context. If the Department of Public Information is the public voice of the Organization, the United Nations information centres are the instruments that give that voice a local accent. The centres have always been an integral part of the Department's global communications strategies, but they are now taking a leading role in coordinating the communications efforts of the entire United Nations country team. With greater horizontal cooperation and coordination among the centres and between information centre staff and communications staff of the United Nations country team, United Nations public information will be greatly enhanced, costly duplications reduced and the voice of the United Nations better heard.

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Modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries: update on new strategic directions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Significant progress has been made by United Nations libraries during 2005 in the implementation of new activities to better support the core work of the Organization and in streamlining traditional library processes. United Nations libraries have worked together, through the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries, to identify and adopt common standards and to find new directions, transforming their services to make them more relevant and effective. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has led this process by focusing on the training of Library staff to adapt to such changes; spearheading innovative services designed to give better support to staff and missions on information management; using technological tools; and enhancing internal communications and knowledge sharing. Library staff are becoming networking facilitators, creating learning opportunities for the exchange of new ideas and bringing information and knowledge to those who need it in their workplaces beyond the walls of the library. In order to reflect these changes and new focus, it is proposed that the official name of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library be expanded to the "Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre".

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 60/109 B, the General Assembly: took note with appreciation of the report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries: new strategic directions (see A/AC.198/2005/4); called upon the Department of Public Information to continue to lead the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries; encouraged the member libraries of the Steering Committee to coordinate closely and to establish time frames for the fulfilment of its programme of work; took note of the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of the operations and management of United Nations libraries (A/59/373); requested the Steering Committee "to pursue new strategies for the work of United Nations libraries, which should aim at enhancing the effectiveness of libraries within existing legislative mandates"; took note of the steps taken by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the other member libraries of the Steering Committee to align their activities, services and outputs more closely with the goals, objectives and operational priorities of the Organization; and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-eighth session on the activities of the Steering Committee and the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, including on the application of measures to enhance the effectiveness of the libraries within existing legislative mandates.

2. The present report, submitted pursuant to resolution 60/109 B, outlines progress achieved in implementing the new strategic directions for United Nations libraries that are members of the Steering Committee (see annex).

II. Libraries in the United Nations environment

A. Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries

3. The Steering Committee held two meetings in 2005, on 14 July (by videoconference) and a face-to-face meeting in Geneva, on 17 October. Its programme of work had been updated following an earlier meeting in March, when standing subcommittees with representation from all libraries were replaced by working groups. The agenda is now project-driven, allowing for voluntary representation of individual libraries based on their areas of specialization and interest, focusing on: management of United Nations documentation; information skills and learning; electronic resources and the World Wide Web; and knowledge sharing. United Nations libraries are working as a network, exploring common solutions to a range of operations, all of which are affected by new technological developments.

4. During 2005, the work of the Steering Committee has resulted in the following concrete action:

(a) **Increased collaboration on the digitization programme between the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva**. Priority was given to the digitization of Security Council documents. As at the end of March 2006, documentation covering the period from 1975 to 1992 will be available in all official languages in the United Nations Official Document

System (ODS). The Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva has also digitized the documentation of the first sessions of the Commission on Human Rights. In view of the current capital master plan proposal to move the Dag Hammarskjöld Library collections to a remote storage location, the Library is identifying other key documents for digitization. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has taken the lead role in exploring partnerships to speed up the digitization of complete collections of United Nations documents;

(b) **Review of guidelines on content management**. A working group has continued its review of guidelines for the indexing, description and analysis of United Nations documentation. In addition, staff from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva are working with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management on the enhancement of ODS. A plan of action for the re-engineering of work-flows to process United Nations documentation has been launched. Librarians, as experts in taxonomies, content organization and information management, are essential partners in this review process. New management approaches in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library have led to more effective use of staff resources in the processing and indexing of documents;

(c) **Acquisition of electronic resources for the United Nations and United Nations system libraries**. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has continued to act as a clearing house for the purchase of electronic resources for United Nations and United Nations system libraries through the United Nations System Electronic Information Acquisition Consortium. That venture has ensured the purchase of electronic resources at a lower cost to the Organization and member agencies, funds and programmes. In addition, the range of products available through the Consortium has grown. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has proposed methods to evaluate the usage of these costly electronic products to ensure that they fulfil actual needs;

(d) **Upgrading information skills and learning in United Nations libraries**. Initiatives are under way to share tools and resources that can be replicated at all duty stations and products that can be shared easily with small and field libraries, depository libraries and members of the Steering Committee. New approaches also include the development of joint training programmes and the organization of virtual seminars to bring together all member libraries. In addition, the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva has developed a training and development needs survey for library staff and has organized training workshops;

(e) **Promoting knowledge sharing**. In addition to the formal meetings of the Steering Committee, which provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and best practices, a new culture of sharing is encouraged in all areas of activity of member libraries. Based on the Dag Hammarskjöld Library knowledge sharing space, developed in Lotus Quickplace, a collaborative electronic workspace was created for all member libraries in which participants can find information and exchange standards, best practices and lessons learned. The personal knowledge management programme, a model piloted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and described in more detail below, will be replicated by the Steering Committee libraries. A collection of knowledge pointers has also been developed and shared among member libraries.

B. Follow-up to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on United Nations libraries

5. In its report on the review of the operations and management of United Nations libraries, recommendation 1 (A/59/373, para. 38), the Office of Internal Oversight Services stated:

> "To ensure sustained and effective collaboration among the libraries, the Steering Committee should develop and propose a new United Nations library policy for approval by the General Assembly. The new policy should address, inter alia, the future role of the United Nations libraries in light of advanced technologies and the Internet and seek to clarify the mandate of the Steering Committee and its funding sources. The libraries of the United Nations specialized agencies should be invited to participate in the Steering Committee in order to achieve the most comprehensive cooperation among libraries".

The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/109 B, took note with appreciation of the new strategic directions report, which outlined the new approaches for United Nations libraries. The specialized agencies of the United Nations were invited to participate in the work of the Steering Committee at the annual meeting of the Inter-Agency Knowledge Sharing and Information Management Meeting, which took place in Geneva from 17 to 19 October 2005.

6. Recommendation 2 of the report (A/59/373, para. 39) stated:

> "When developing the United Nations library policy, the Steering Committee should: (i) address the issue of further harmonizing and collaborating on the use of technology and Internet in all United Nations libraries; and (ii) establish a timetable for each action in its work plan and ensure compliance with deadlines".

As noted in paragraph 4 (b) above, the introduction of new enterprise applications for content management will have an impact on the way libraries conduct their operations and will ensure greater consistency in the use of technology across the Organization. The new role assigned to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the coordination of the United Nations Secretariat Intranet will facilitate this process and ensure that the model is replicated to other libraries for their internal and public websites. Guidelines are being developed to ensure greater consistency among departments.

7. Recommendation 3 of the report (A/59/373, para. 40) called upon the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva to:

> " ... develop and introduce common productivity standards in all major areas of their operations and maintain an appropriate mechanism to assess actual performance against established standards. As part of this process, consideration should be given to reviewing the new performance indicators for the strategic framework (2006-2007) developed by the United Nations Office at Geneva".

As a result of the reorientation process initiated by the Department of Public Information in 2002, a culture of evaluation has permeated all areas of the Department's work. New activities undertaken by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library have been monitored and evaluated. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Library of

the United Nations Office at Geneva have developed common productivity standards in all major areas of their operations, including maintaining statistics on reference queries.

8. Recommendation 4 of the report (A/59/373, para. 41) called upon the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva to:

> " ... treat the transfer of older documents to electronic format as a special project, which would involve resource-sharing. The project should include digitization, retrospective conversion of the old card catalogues and indexing of pre-1979 United Nations documents. The full extent of the tasks should be accurately determined, a strategy and a timetable for completing the tasks formulated and the amount of resources determined and mobilized".

As noted in paragraph 4 (a) above, the digitization of United Nations documentation is treated as a cooperative project between the two libraries and resources are shared to increase efficiency and speed in processing. The division of work is based on the availability of equipment and material at both libraries. Based on this mandate, the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva maintains archival collections of the material it acquires. Priority was therefore given to the retrospective conversion of the card catalogue of the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva, which was completed at the end of 2003. Conversion of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library card catalogue is being conducted as a special project in the context of the capital master plan. The relocation of collections and the elimination of a number of items in the external materials collections will obviate the need to convert cards for such items. Indexing of pre-1979 documents is an ongoing process, conducted in parallel with the digitization programme.

C. Collaboration between the libraries of the United Nations system

9. As noted in paragraphs 4 (c) and 5 above, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has continued to play an active role in inter-agency library activities. In addition to managing the United Nations Consortium, it has provided a new vision for the transformation of United Nations libraries and was responsible for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries (A/AC.198/2005/4) to the above-mentioned 2005 Inter-Agency Knowledge Sharing and Information Management Meeting, which endorsed the report. At the same meeting, the United Nations system libraries were invited to participate in the work of the Steering Committee.

10. At the same meeting, a newly established central gateway to all United Nations library resources was presented and approved by the libraries of the United Nations system. This gateway also includes links to all United Nations system publishing services. The launch of this gateway, which is constantly being updated by individual libraries, rendered the United Nations System Shared Cataloguing and Public Access System defunct, resulting in cost savings for the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which had been maintaining it.

11. With the completion of the above activities, all recommendations made in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services have now been implemented.

III. New directions for United Nations libraries

A. Becoming centres of knowledge: providing new services and modernizing traditional ones

12. United Nations libraries are moving from their traditional role as independent repositories to networks of knowledge sharing communities, moving from building and maintaining book and periodical collections to facilitating a knowledge-enabled environment and the exchange of information among stakeholders. United Nations libraries are reorienting their products and services, their physical spaces, their staff skills and their working relationships with their colleagues within the Organization in order to offer timely and relevant support to their growing and changing constituencies. They are also redeploying and renewing the skill sets of their staff to meet the needs of a challenging new work environment. United Nations libraries are now providing increasingly personalized service and direct support to constituents, resulting in the more effective dissemination of information. Library staff are learning to adapt to the new environment created by the technology and resources available on the Internet in order to provide access to a range of electronic collections, regardless of their location. Print collections continue to be maintained and new methods of advertising their contents are being explored. To reflect the changes and to provide a new image, it is proposed that the official name of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library be expanded to the "Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre".

13. One of the key challenges for United Nations libraries is the realignment of services towards operational priorities. The inward focus on traditional technical library work at the United Nations, which was necessary before the existence of networks, has now shifted to a model of service that is oriented towards making connections for its users, between documents and functions, between people and documents and between people and people. As with other institutional libraries worldwide, the client groups of United Nations libraries are faced with managing an overwhelming amount of information and a rapidly changing work environment that continuously introduces new technologies, new networks and new colleagues.

14. Knowledge sharing and content management are essential aspects of management reform. Libraries in all duty stations are rethinking and reinforcing their roles in this regard. During the second quarter of 2005, the Library was given the responsibility of managing the Organization's Intranet, iSeek, in an effort to enhance and improve internal communications. Experiments with new methods were carried out to encourage a dialogue from the top, down, from the bottom, up and across the Organization. This has resulted in a more prominent, pragmatic role in management reform, helping to strengthen the United Nations through better information and knowledge sharing. In addition to revamping the Intranet, the Library developed a Secretariat-wide internal communications strategy. The goal of this strategy is to ensure that all Secretariat staff, regardless of their duty station, have access to the same level of information, as well as to a user-friendly interface linking to enterprise-wide tools. Attention was given to ensuring usability of the Intranet site, accessibility by all duty stations and offices away from Headquarters, including the network of United Nations information centres and services, and peacekeeping missions. The site is updated frequently with new stories and photographs, highlighting events of importance to staff. The underlying blueprint

was to establish a coherent Intranet for United Nations staff worldwide, using a consistent layout and standard technology and providing relevant, up-to-date messages. Although global in reach, some of the content is localized to ensure its relevance to each duty station. Anecdotal evidence and feedback from departmental focal points indicate that the redesigned iSeek is viewed positively by United Nations staff and that the site is becoming the primary source of internal information for them.

15. To adapt to the continually changing information paradigm, new training courses were launched to assist clients in using the plethora of information sources and services available to United Nations audiences. As in previous years, training courses were organized on: accessing United Nations documentation; searching methods to access the wide variety of resources on the Internet; coaching services; and personalized training. Information coaches help staff find and organize information in their offices and at their work stations within the personal knowledge management programme, a new initiative.

16. The personal knowledge management programme aims to create an information management consulting service to assist staff and United Nations delegations in dealing with the increasingly complex information environment through direct support services that are offered on a case-by-case basis to address specific problems. The needs of individual users and small teams are met through a process of discovering knowledge gaps and providing team training and individual coaching in the tools and techniques to help fill them. Staff at all levels and from all sections of the Library were involved in launching the service. Library professionals are being transformed into networking facilitators, essential team members in the United Nations community of knowledge workers, who are helping to change the perception of what the Library does and giving it an expanded presence across the Organization. Through interviews, staff members determined the information needs of staff at large and the permanent missions, and later followed up with coaching sessions to help manage the glut of information received by staff on a daily basis through their desktops, mobile phone devices and from various media. The staff who were surveyed indicated a need for tips, advice and coaching on creating, managing and accessing information, which is what the personal knowledge management programme now offers. By the end of 2005, 48 Library staff members had been trained to become interviewers, having met with over 260 clients and identified coaching requirements. Interview surveys revealed that the most pressing needs for coaching and training were in the following areas: e-mail archiving; finding United Nations documents; and using electronic resources. Other coaching needs cited included: organizing research collections; searching iSeek and the web; understanding the use of desktop management tools and weblogs; and techniques for electronic filing, using Lotus Notes, Quickplace and Microsoft Word. Based on this needs assessment, 11 coaching modules were developed and a collection of 20 knowledge pointers were produced. The one-page documents give tips on using software applications, managing e-mail archives and undertaking a search. The Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva is producing a printed set of the pointers, which will be shared with all members of the Steering Committee. The Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva has adopted a similar strategy of client-focus direct information support services offered to participants in its orientation programme.

17. A close partnership was formed with the Information Technology Services Division in launching both new activities (personal knowledge management programme and iSeek). Future work will involve close collaboration with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the Office of Human Resources Management in particular. Satisfaction surveys on the personal knowledge management programme were conducted with Library staff (on involvement in the process) and with clients (on usefulness): 87 per cent of Library staff and 89.7 per cent of clients who responded expressed overall satisfaction.

18. Networked libraries without walls and initiatives, such as the personal knowledge management programme will make United Nations information professionals more visible. Recommendations have been made under the capital master plan, for the Library to be renovated and redesigned, providing an opportunity for more innovation. During the renovation phase, service points, consulting services and collections will need to be set up in various locations to ensure support to clients. Library services will be extended to departments, including staff from groups that have not previously made use of conventional library services. During the change process and beyond, important traditional library functions and services, including essential paper-based collections, will be retained.

19. Another challenge faced by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, other libraries of the United Nations system and libraries worldwide is the shift from print to electronic publishing. An estimated 70 per cent of commercial journals are now available electronically, a trend that has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in subscription prices. At present, the cost of subscribing to such resources represents over 40 per cent of the non-staff resources of the budget of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and is increasing. For clients, this has resulted in the availability of remote access on a round-the-clock basis, but library budgets have been severely impacted and will require new cost-sharing arrangements among user departments. More attention has been given to targeting electronic information in order to ensure that these resources are being used effectively and that they respond to specific user needs.

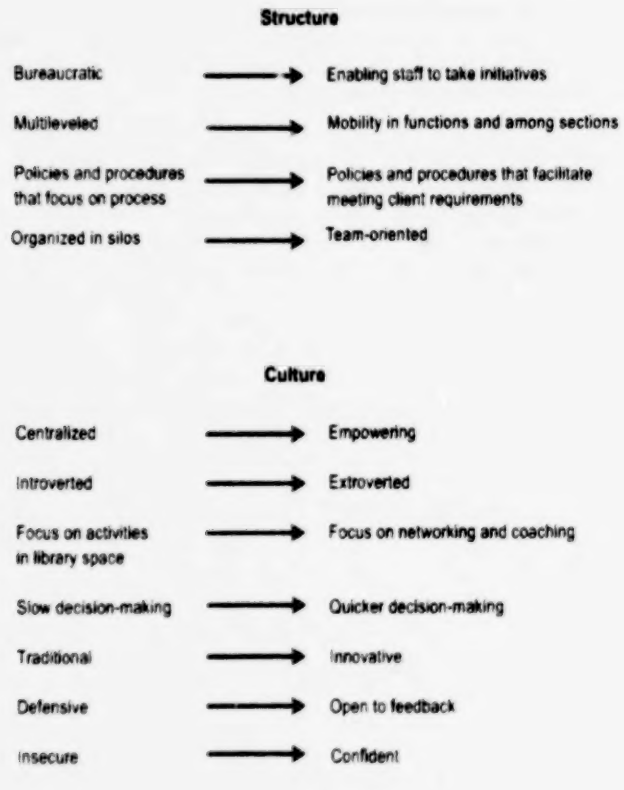
B. Managing the change process: transforming library capacities and services

20. For a change process to be successful, a group of people must serve as its engine, as the catalysts for change. In the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the staff at all levels who were involved in the personal knowledge management programme fulfilled this role. That group, who in terms of organizational structure reports to various sections, served as change agents by participating in the drafting of strategy documents; initiating ideas for new services; launching discussion groups; and leading, supporting and sustaining training efforts for both Library staff and clients. Those activities created a sense of ownership of the change process and ensured their involvement. Both clerical and professional staff were involved in the change process. Not all staff who participated in the personal knowledge management programme were fully engaged in the process; some found it difficult to adapt to the new approach, since it involved far more contact with clients than they were accustomed to. For the most part, however, the new approach forced staff to adopt new roles and challenges that they readily accepted.

21. Staff were also involved in some of the more visible activities, such as the "Lectures and Conversations Series" launched in 2005, by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, with the support of the Government of Sweden, to mark the centenary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld. Those events brought together senior management, well-known experts, United Nations officials and missions to discuss a variety of themes, from the legacy of Dag Hammarskjöld to disaster relief and peacekeeping. The launch of the newly designed Intranet in August 2005 provided heightened visibility of those events and other new activities.

22. The innovations described in the present report have brought about a change of perception and increased visibility of Dag Hammarskjöld Library staff. Instead of working mainly being behind the scenes, Library staff are now more active in a wide variety of activities throughout the Organization and are closely involved in managing new projects and events and initiating different ways to make connections. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has made progress in transforming its services, staff capacity and image over the past 12 months. However, more change is planned throughout the next biennium and beyond. Staff will continue to benefit from more training and personal coaching to help them adapt to the process. Communicating positive messages and promoting new activities and a new image will help to break down some of the roadblocks. A retreat was organized for Library staff in December 2005, in which 28 General Service and Professional staff participated. The gathering provided a team-building opportunity and an occasion to share the vision and identify solutions for achieving it. The Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva also organized a training workshop for all staff to reflect on future activities. Figure 1 below provides an overview of some of the objectives of the change process.

Figure 1
Moving from collections to connections



C. Extending the outreach

23. Depository libraries have played a key role in the outreach strategy of the United Nations. However, since those institutions themselves have been transformed, the services to them need to be updated in order to provide new ways of disseminating information and knowledge. A 2004 survey demonstrated that the majority of depository libraries surveyed, including those in developing countries, have Internet access on library premises as follows: 100 per cent in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and North America; 94.2 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 88 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean; 86.7 per cent in Western Asia; and 76.6 per cent in Africa. All depository libraries have requested increased and better access to electronic information. Print collections require space and are not easily organized. Some depository libraries would like to continue to receive printed documents, in addition to electronic access, although, interestingly, most such requests are from depository libraries in developed countries.

24. Access to electronic information requires technology and infrastructure that many libraries in developing countries lack. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library has begun to explore funding opportunities with foundations and other donors to assist in resolving some of the issues so that those institutions can benefit from the wealth of information and knowledge available in United Nations documents and on the Internet. In addition, new ways of encouraging the use of United Nations materials has been explored with those libraries. During the third quarter of 2005, a set of resources, an "Exhibition in a Box", which included publications, flyers and posters, was sent to 400 depository libraries in 145 countries and to all United Nations information centres and services. The materials and posters related to 12 major areas of United Nations activities, which were summarized in a "UN Milestones" poster, the centrepiece of the "Exhibition in a Box". All depository libraries were invited to add to their exhibition any other United Nations-related issues in which their country or region might be interested. All recipients were asked to launch the exhibition on or close to United Nations Day, 24 October 2005. A web page was created for the project, and feedback and photographs received were posted on the site. The majority of depository libraries used those resources to promote their activities locally.

25. The Internal Communications Unit, which is part of the Knowledge Sharing Section of the Library that manages iSeek, is working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to identify coherent approaches to providing information to peacekeeping operations. Desktop delivery of all essential information will facilitate the decision-making process in field operations. The Internal Communications Unit is also providing support and guidelines to offices away from Headquarters in order to ensure the adoption of a common approach to managing content on the Intranet and to improve internal communications. The Chief Librarians at the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific were designated content focal points for the new Intranet under iSeek, and their teams work in close cooperation with the Internal Communications Unit.

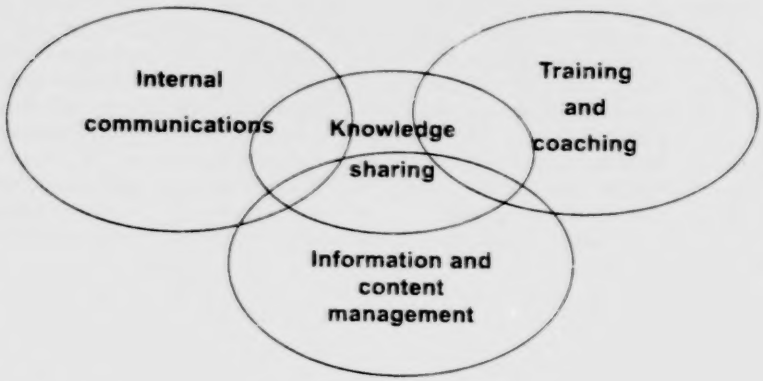
D. Refocus and reorientation

26. A main challenge will be for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and other United Nations libraries to more effectively support the information needs of a diverse

clientele in a continually changing information environment, an environment in which knowledge workers are challenged by the information overload caused by an ever-increasing number and complexity of issues. By streamlining some of the traditional library processes and continuing to retain selective paper-based collections, United Nations libraries will respond to this challenge with a reorientation towards the three main areas of concentration that have been described above and are depicted in figure 2 below:

Figure 2
United Nations libraries: refocus and reorientation

- Information and content management
- Training and coaching
- Internal communications



IV. Conclusions

27. United Nations libraries are becoming key players in the field of knowledge sharing and content management for the Organization and are now in a position to play a more significant role in the reform process, assisting with internal communications and providing better access to information and knowledge. The combined experience, understanding and institutional memory embodied in the United Nations libraries and their staff have the potential to contribute significantly to this effort. United Nations libraries have continued to fulfil their original mandates while adapting innovative approaches, tools and skills for the twenty-first century. Paper collections will be maintained, while new methods of custodianship and preservation will allow library staff to devote more time and effort to discovering and promoting their relevance and value. The objective of this refocus is to ensure the relevancy of United Nations libraries, making them the facilitators of a networked community, and to ensure that their staff become an essential part of the team in the United Nations community of knowledge workers.

Annex

United Nations libraries participating in the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries

The 10 separate United Nations libraries represented on the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries are:

Dag Hammarskjöld Library at United Nations Headquarters in New York

Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva

United Nations libraries at Vienna, which serve the United Nations Office at Vienna, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization

Sergio Vieira de Mello Library at Nairobi, which includes the libraries of the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the United Nations Information Centre

The libraries of the following regional commissions:

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

And the libraries of:

United Nations University

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

United Nations A/AC.198/2006/3

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The United Nations website: recent developments and progress towards parity among the official languages

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is the seventh in the series addressing the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations website. It is submitted to the Committee on Information to provide updated information on progress towards achieving parity among the official languages on the United Nations website.

06-24001 (E) 270206

I. Introduction

1. Since June 1995, when the official United Nations website was established on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization, parity between the six official languages on the site has been one of the major issues of concern of the Committee on Information. Six reports of the Secretary-General have addressed this issue: A/AC.198/1999/6, A/AC.198/1999/9 and Corr.1 and 2, A/AC.198/2000/7-A/AC.172/2000/4, A/AC.198/2001/8, A/AC.198/2002/6 and A/AC.198/2005/6. In a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session (A/57/355) the Secretary-General laid down the resource requirements for establishing the six language units on a firm footing to meet the challenges of moving towards parity of the official languages on the United Nations website. The present report provides an update of the progress made towards language parity on the United Nations website and outlines future steps that will further enhance it.

II. Background

2. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/109 B of 8 December 2005, reaffirmed that the United Nations website remains a very useful tool for the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, Member States and the general public. It recognized the efforts of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat in creating and maintaining it, and reaffirmed the need to achieve full parity among the six official languages on the United Nations website. The Assembly took note of the fact that the multilingual development and enrichment of the United Nations website had improved, although at a slower rate than expected owing to several constraints that needed to be addressed, and, in that regard, requested the Department of Public Information, in coordination with content-providing offices, to improve the actions undertaken to achieve parity among the six official languages on the United Nations website

3. In the same resolution, the General Assembly also noted that the integration of the Official Document System (ODS) with the United Nations website had resulted in a significant enhancement of the multilingual nature of the website owing to availability of United Nations parliamentary documentation in the six official languages. In addition, the Assembly recognized the efforts made by the Department to implement the basic accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities to the United Nations website. It called upon the Department to continue to work towards compliance with all levels of accessibility requirements on all pages of the website with the aim of ensuring its accessibility.

III. Current governance and management

4. The goal of parity among the official languages on the United Nations website set by Member States poses a particular challenge not only for the Department of Public Information as manager of the website, but also for all other content-providing offices. The sheer complexity and practicality of the problem and the scale of resources needed to meet the request of the General Assembly has been submitted in earlier reports to the Committee on Information and to the Fifth Committee.

5. The challenge facing the Secretariat in moving towards the goal of parity in the official languages on the United Nations website has many aspects. Fundamental is the reality that every day more material is being placed on the site by author departments in the working languages, English and French, but overwhelmingly in the former. This constant building of the website is carried out within a decentralized governance structure. The Department of Public Information has worked through the Working Group on Internet Matters, which the Department chairs, as well as bilaterally with other content-providing offices to promote multilingualism and site coherence in a practical manner. This effort has been slow and has meant considerable limitations in the Department's capacity to drive the goal of parity forward, particularly given the reality of budgetary and technical constraints facing all departments in this regard.

6. The need for continuous renewal of the website means the challenge of achieving parity is made more complex every day. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/109 B, in reaffirming its request to the Secretary-General to ensure an adequate distribution of financial and human resources within the Department of Public Information for the website among all official languages, also stated that it should be done while maintaining an up-to-date and accurate website.

7. There are several conceptual issues relating to parity among official languages on the website which are important to note. Simply increasing the number of pages in official languages is not a real solution, because there is a need to ensure technical resources to support them. Every new piece of information going up on the website requires a further commitment to monitoring and updating; otherwise, the purpose of the website is seriously undermined, especially in today's world of multiple electronic sources of immediate news and information. The commitment of resources to this function for pages in all official languages is therefore essential, but comes at a cost in the pace in which new material can be processed in all languages.

8. While the fact of continuous new material presents a major challenge in enhancing the multilingual nature of the United Nations website, technical changes are nevertheless producing progress towards this goal in a number of ways. The Department is working towards enhancing the multimedia nature of the site, and through it, the delivery of material in audio and visual forms to an expanding global audience. Radio files in all the official languages, Kiswahili, Portuguese, as well as Bangla, Hindi, Indonesian and Urdu, are enhancing the multilingualism of the site. Webcasting is now available in the floor language and the Department is planning its gradual expansion to the other official languages, again offering a daily enhancement of the multilingualism of the site. Given that the rationale behind the drive to enhancing multilingualism on the website is to ensure wider access to information on the United Nations to all the peoples of the world, such technical enhancements to the site are a key means to that end, along with progress in such areas as improving access for persons with disabilities.

9. With respect to the mandate to publish in the official languages, Member States have recognized the responsibility of the individual author departments for producing their websites in the official languages. The Department of Public Information has sought to actively promote multilingualism on the United Nations website across the Secretariat through the Working Group on Internet Matters, as well as bilaterally with author offices. The present governance structure, however,

which lacks an adequate set of standards and an accountability mechanism, has invariably led to a site wanting in multilingual content, as well as in presentational consistency and organizational branding. Offices have developed sites at their own initiative, without an organizational oversight mechanism that would establish agreed standards and goals, instead of merely producing guidelines. In many cases, standard coding practices have been dispensed with, causing system instabilities. The Department is reviewing the entire governance mechanism in coordination with the Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, to ensure a system that provides coherent organizational strategies for both content and technology. An important element of this will be the revitalization of the Working Group on Internet Matters, as a mechanism for more effective encouragement and coordination with content-providing offices for publishing content in all official languages. The Department is also working with the Information Technology Services Division to develop common technical standards for software and programming, as opposed to guidelines, and intends to make these standards an organizational requirement.

10. A system of governance that will introduce coherence is essential for further development of the website and progress towards language parity. It is a challenge to put into place an overall governance scheme for coherent management and governance of the public website that allows differing authoring offices the creativity to meet the needs of their particular audiences — be they government officials, the media, academia, civil society or the public at large — while ensuring a unitary technical infrastructure, consistency in presentation, organizational branding, addressing accessibility needs, as well as the imperative of producing material in all official languages. There is a need for a robust and secure system that can grow and develop, leading to greater efficiencies in the management of multilingual content.

11. In terms of its own areas of responsibility, the Department has striven to ensure language parity in key areas of information about the Organization and its activities. For example, the websites of the General Assembly and the Security Council provide access to the documents and activities of these two bodies in the six official languages; the News Centres provide breaking news on a 24-hour news cycle in all languages, the United Nations Radio web pages provide Radio news in all official languages, in addition to Kiswahili and Portuguese, and all are updated daily. This daily updating and maintenance consumes a large proportion of the resources allocated to the language sites. The websites developed by the Department for conferences and events are also made available in the six languages. While overall progress has not been as fast as desired, key information areas on the website have made significant strides in enhancing the multilingual nature of the site.

IV. Current website usage

12. Visitors from more than 199 countries and territories access the United Nations website, viewing more than one million pages daily. Total accesses ("hits") have grown from over 2.16 billion in 2003 to over 2.7 billion in 2005. The United Nations website currently receives an average of over 7.5 million accesses daily. Pages viewed rather than accesses provide a more accurate indication of actual usage of the material. The increases in the number of pages viewed and accesses to

the entire site in 2005, compared with the previous years, are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1
Pages viewed and accesses to the United Nations website (2002-2005)

www.un.org	*Pages viewed*	*Accesses*
A. Yearly totals		
2002	221 433 750	1 606 841 549
2003	268 027 080	2 165 122 997
2004	337 544 975	2 331 566 302
2005	396 566 178	2 766 987 638
B. Daily averages		
2002	606 668	4 402 306
2003	734 321	5 931 844
2004	922 254	6 370 490
2005	1 085 762	7 575 761

13. The upward trend in the use of the website has been consistent among the language sites, although the scale of the increase varies widely. Table 2 below depicts the increase in the number of accesses, as well as the number of pages viewed across the language sites from 2004 to 2005.

Table 2
Increase in the number of page views and accesses to the United Nations website across languages (2005 against 2004)

	Arabic	*Chinese*	*English*	*French*	*Russian*	*Spanish*	*Entire United Nations website*
Accesses							
2004	42 525 599	80 332 093	1 813 864 719	148 614 628	45 947 257	200 282 006	2 331 566 302
2005	60 060 418	91 653 371	2 099 191 364	198 244 221	61 564 818	256 273 446	2 766 987 638
2005 vs. 2004 (percentage)	+41.23	+14.09	+15.73	+33.39	+33.99	+27.96	+18.68
Pages viewed							
2004	7 760 675	13 619 715	276 026 961	15 150 059	9 575 366	15 412 199	337 544 975
2005	10 178 618	18 433 275	318 133 891	18 267 863	11 873 869	19 678 662	396 566 178
2005 vs. 2004 (percentage)	+31.16	+35.34	+15.25	+20.58	+24.00	+27.68	+17.49

14. As table 3 below shows, the overall number of new pages on the site has steadily risen. The Department is presently responsible for the majority of these language pages. The Web Services Section, which handles the bulk of these pages, has posted more new or updated pages in languages other than English or French,

demonstrating the same progress in closing the gap between languages in key areas. The table also demonstrates that the creation of new pages requires more maintenance and updating. Table 3 shows the number of pages handled by the Web Services Section only.

Table 3
New pages created and pages updated in 2004 and 2005 by the Web Services Section of the Department of Public Information

New pages						*Updated pages*					
Arabic	*Chinese*	*English*	*French*	*Russian*	*Spanish*	*Arabic*	*Chinese*	*English*	*French*	*Russian*	*S*
787	2 115	984	904	1 219	1 163	4 645	3 493	3 802	2 580	4 381	

V. Achievements

15. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/109 B, stressed the need to adopt a decision on the multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations website and requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals to establish separate units for each of the six official languages within the Department of Public Information, in order to achieve full parity among the official languages of the United Nations.

16. As a result of the closure of United Nations Information Centres in Western Europe, one P-4 and six General Service posts were deployed to the Web Services Section in January 2004. The formal recruitment to the P-4 post enabled the Department to establish the first of the six language units, the Arabic Website Unit, on 1 December 2004. In accordance with paragraph 2 of section IX of General Assembly resolution 59/276 of 23 December 2004, the Department submitted proposals to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations website, within the context of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007. Four new P-4 posts were requested to complete the establishment of the language units and have been approved by the General Assembly. With the creation of the language units, the Website Languages Unit has been dissolved. The encumbered P-4 post of the Chief of that Unit has been designated as the Chief of the English Language Unit. This increased capacity will allow improved management of each language site on a continuous basis, as opposed to the current situation where each language is left without professional coverage for approximately eight weeks of the year as a result of leave schedules, illness or travel. This enhanced capacity will permit an acceleration of processing of new pages in languages other than English, more assistance to other departments to render their content in other languages, and more resources for maintenance of existing pages. There will be increased assistance towards content generation for the News Centre and other new sites, as well as the processing of more material translated pro bono by a number of universities (see below).

17. The scale of the additional resources required to achieve parity has been presented in earlier reports. With the new resources referred to in paragraph 16, the Department will continue to strive towards improving parity without sacrificing the comprehensiveness and the up-to-date nature of the site. Additional new pages in all languages will be available at a greater frequency. Key to this strategy is a focus on

heavily used sites covering a wide range of activities. Language parity has already been achieved in the General Assembly, Security Council, news and radio portions of the site. The Department will strive to expand these areas. Special attention will be paid to areas showing higher levels of usage.

18. The Department has taken a number of steps to supplement staffing resources in the drive to enhance multilingualism on the website. In this regard, the Department wishes to express its gratitude to the Government of Spain for continuing to provide an associate expert for the development of the Spanish site, and to the Government of France for providing an associate expert to work on the French site. The Department continues to aggressively utilize the services of interns and skilled volunteers in a number of the official languages to complement the work performed by the staff.

19. Many content-providing offices lack the expertise to provide their content in official languages other than English. The Department has been sharing the expertise it has developed over the past 10 years, and is assisting other content-providing offices in rendering their English pages into the official languages, on a cost-reimbursable basis. For example, under arrangements with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the economic and social development area of the website and many of the *Global Issues on the UN Agenda* pages have been made available in all languages. Similar arrangements are in the process of being set up with other departments in order to assist in rendering their content into the other official languages.

20. As previously reported, the Department has also managed to increase the number of pages available in some languages by use of external pro bono translations provided by academic institutions. Agreements are in place with the University of Salamanca (Spain), Shaoxing University (China) and Minsk State Linguistic University (Belarus), resulting in an increased number of new pages for Chinese, Russian and Spanish. While that action has increased the pool of available material in the three languages, the need for editorial control, programming and processing, given the Department's limited staff resources, has presented a bottleneck to the full utilization of this translation capacity. It is expected that the addition of the new posts will address this issue and allow greater use to be made of these pro bono translations.

21. Improving the user experience of finding information on the United Nations website has been an important aspect of enhancing the website. To this end, the site-wide search engine was successfully implemented on the United Nations website in September 2004. A visitor to the United Nations website is now able to search for material in all official languages, and retrieve content available on the United Nations site or ODS, or any one of several websites of participating offices away from Headquarters. There are a total of 36 United Nations servers worldwide being indexed by the search engine. All customization on the content and layout of the search and search-result pages was developed in-house for the six United Nations official languages, which includes non-Roman alphabet and bi-directional languages. This has made possible the global search option on the ODS site as well.

22. The transition to an upgraded search engine began in November 2005, and was completed by the end of January 2006. This upgrade has enabled the creation of more defined areas of search and is providing continuous indexing, so that new materials are also available through the search function without delay. The

Department continues to work with the Information Technology Services Division and the search engine vendor on ways to improve the speed and ease of information searches on the United Nations website. Key matches have been created in order to identify the web pages most likely to answer queries. News focus pages have been created in an effort to consolidate content types and areas for similar types of information. A user feedback page was created and incorporated on the search results page in all United Nations official languages. However, the full use and further development of the search system to fulfil the demands from other content-providing offices for customized search pages and collections to limit search results to their sites will only be periodic and will take time to implement because the resources required have yet to be identified. Likewise, a quick response to unsuccessful searches requires continuous monitoring. From a management perspective, a much-needed analysis of user search patterns continues to present a challenge. In order to provide this type of follow-up action effectively and efficiently, dedicated resources need to be assigned to it, which means that this task can be achieved only at the cost of limiting progress in other areas.

23. The Web Services Section, using in-house technical and linguistic expertise, is now undertaking programming and graphic design as a common service for all languages. Introducing the use of Unicode has significantly reduced the need to create the underlying programming for each language separately, thus streamlining the work flow and development time by reducing manual inputting and thereby enabling much faster information delivery. The use of Unicode has also resulted in a more uniform appearance of web pages in all official languages. These innovations and productivity improvements through the use of internally developed database applications have also permitted implementation of sites in different languages to be achieved within existing resources. A new United Nations Radio site has been launched in all official languages thanks to using this workflow, which has made possible the creation of language sites in a more compressed time frame. Drawing on these databases, it is now possible to quickly create specific news focus pages in all languages in response to rapidly changing news requirements. A completely automated page for broadcasters is being implemented where broadcasters can download news stories and features for re-broadcast in a broadcast-quality format. United Nations photographs are now available on the web through a database-driven web module that was developed completely in-house. With the rapid increase in the data-driven applications, given the need for back-up and support systems to sustain this daily operation, additional capacity is still required to maintain the systems and applications.

24. The United Nations Webcast has proven to be a cost-effective communications tool with global outreach. It broadcasts daily live and on-demand over the Internet, United Nations meetings such as the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and press briefings, conferences and events from United Nations Headquarters, as well as major United Nations conferences held abroad. It promotes transparency and accessibility by providing instant information to users worldwide on the proceedings of open United Nations meetings. Over 7.2 million webcast clips — both live and archived — were viewed by users from over 175 countries during 2005. The e-mail alert system for the daily webcast schedule garnered 2,196 subscribers in 2005, bringing the total number of subscribers to 4,948.

25. A new webcast studio is now in operation and additional equipment has permitted the expansion of webcasting. At the request of Member States, all open meetings of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council are now webcast with the original language of the speaker as well as the English audio. This was introduced for the 2005 World Summit, and was carried into the General Assembly's general debate, furthering the goal of parity among official languages. Contingent upon the availability of adequate webcast facilities and resources, the United Nations Webcast plans to expand its Internet broadcast services into the six official languages.

26. While endeavouring to achieve parity in the six official languages on the United Nations website, especially the enhancement of the multilingual News Centre web portal and its efforts to expand its capacity to provide webcasts simultaneously in official languages, the Department is very conscious of the need to facilitate access, to the extent resources permit, to United Nations information to audiences in languages other than the six official languages of the Organization. The Organization's activities are portrayed to local audiences in 27 other languages, thereby achieving greater universality, thanks in large part to the work of the United Nations information centres, which respond to the needs to these local audiences.

27. As a consequence of the requirement to ensure accessibility to the United Nations website by persons with disabilities, including visual and hearing disabilities, a portion of the existing resources has been allocated to this function. There are widely differing standards between countries, as well as within the international Internet community. A single recognized set of standards that can be applied to all languages is yet to emerge. The Department has been working with the Inclusive Development Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and through that Section with experts in the field, to progress in this area. The Department has already begun the use of software that allows developers to partially automate testing to meet accessibility and usability guidelines and to simplify the process of understanding and complying with the World Wide Web Consortium standards, which at the present time is the only standard with worldwide acceptance. The Department has so far implemented the basic accessibility requirements for the top layers of the site and is still working on wider implementation. The following steps are being followed:

(a) Ensuring that all new pages are created in conformity with the accepted standards of the World Wide Web Consortium;

(b) Maintaining the difference between structure and presentation elements; using style sheets where appropriate;

(c) Using Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), version 4.0, features to provide information about the purpose and function of elements;

(d) Ensuring that the pages can be navigated by keyboard;

(e) Providing alternative methods to access non-textual content, including images, scripts, multimedia, tables, forms and frames, for user agents that do not display them.

28. It is important to note that ensuring compliance with the minimum requirements for access by persons with disabilities is not without cost. Current efforts to this end have resulted in an overall slowdown in the production and

updating of existing pages. On average, each new or updated page requires an additional processing time of 15 to 20 per cent to achieve compliance. Development and updates of existing pages have been reduced, thereby further slowing down the progress towards parity among official languages.

VI. Looking forward

29. The Department plans to modernize the architecture of the website to provide faster access to the features users actually seek. Improving navigation and usability of a website is critical to a successful site. For this to be achieved, the website development process must include detailed site traffic analysis. More sophisticated analysis will permit prioritization to topics of interest across languages. The Web Services Section continuously monitors and analyses site usage and is providing nearly 150 daily and monthly log analysis statistics. In 2005, the log analysis features were expanded in order to introduce new analytic parameters (key word analysis, more identifiable visitor country location, broken links reports, etc.) and to ensure improved response to the user demands as well as enhanced quality control. However, there is a necessary trade-off in the allocation of available resources between site development, parity among languages, compliance with disability requirements and site analysis.

30. One of the constraints in moving towards parity among languages is the level of technical expertise available in author departments and offices. In collaboration with the Training Service of the Office of Human Resources Management, the Department has brought specialized training in relevant web development software in-house. This cost-effective measure has afforded an opportunity to all staff working on their respective sites to enhance their skills and be more productive. Paragraph 16 above describes the benefits to accrue from the four new P-4 posts in the Web Services Section, including an acceleration in page accession, although the pace and scale of this will be affected by the need to continue the normal maintenance and upgrading work. The recruitment of junior staff with the appropriate skill sets for web design and programming has been a problem. Three P-2 posts in the Web Development Unit could only be filled by temporary staff, since no suitable staff were found as a result of the competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories and the national competitive examinations during the past two years. To address this issue, the Department, in collaboration with the Office of Human Resources Management, introduced a special national competitive examination in web development in 2005.

31. The Department is collaborating with the Information Technology Services Division and other content-providing offices in the search for an enterprise content management system that will be capable of handling the language, presentation, multimedia and accessibility requirements of the website, and for a new and improved enterprise search system. The search has proved to be extremely complex in that it appears that no integrated system is currently capable of fully handling all the required aspects. The Department is continuing the evaluation of systems in collaboration with the Information Technology Services Division and other content-providing offices.

32. While awaiting the identification, acquisition and implementation of an enterprise content management system, the Department will continue to redesign portions of the United Nations website in 2006, and will progressively incorporate more database-driven features. Increasingly automated processes and easy access to news and latest developments will be introduced, as will be better navigation, presentation, search and accessibility in compliance with disability requirements.

33. The Department is also cooperating with the Information Technology Services Division in the multilingual desktop project by providing information on the settings of standard enterprise applications which enable them to work with the three non-Latin official languages, and to explore if these settings can be set automatically.

34. To meet new technology standards and demands, the Department will continue its cooperation and collaboration with the Information Technology Services Division to improve the technological infrastructure of the website. In late 2005, the database servers, which had reached almost crisis proportions, were replaced with new equipment, resulting in considerable performance improvement. The expansion of the capacity to disseminate information, access to news by RSS feeds, sending news to mobile devices and creating news mailing lists is included in the plan to improve technological infrastructure. Owing to the technical infrastructure requirements of handling large amounts of outgoing mail, the e-mail news alerts service in the languages will be implemented on a step-by-step basis.

35. The project on the United Nations system portal is also under way. The Information Technology Services Division, together with user offices, has completed the requirements identification phase and is now moving forward to the evaluation stage.

VII. Conclusion

36. The Department is striving to accelerate the pace of moving towards parity among the official languages on the website. The establishment of new P-4 posts goes a long way towards providing much of the resources needed to meet the challenge of parity among official languages as outlined in document A/57/355. With the establishment of separate language units, the Department will be able to increase the volume of new material going onto the site and the required maintenance and updating. It will also have more capacity to work with content-providing offices to accelerate their posting of material in all official languages, backed by a stronger governance mechanism. This positive development will be reinforced by other measures, including the necessary technical enhancements.

37. Parity, however, should not be achieved at the cost of quality. Continual development of the site is vital to ensuring user satisfaction and to widening access. To this end, the technological infrastructure is being overhauled, a new content management system is being sought, and the site is being revamped to provide better navigation and improved access for persons with disabilities.

38. The Department is focusing on key areas, not only with new pages with textual information, but including webcasting, audio, video and photographic materials, all enhancing the multilingual nature of the United Nations website and aimed at continually broadening its outreach to a wider range of audiences in all regions of the world.

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Assessing the effectiveness of United Nations public information products and activities: the results of a three-year evaluation project

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The comprehensive three-year review of its major product and service lines, conducted in collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, has enabled the Department of Public Information to ensure that a culture of evaluation permeates the full range of its work. The Department is now in a better position to measure the effectiveness of its work and, on that basis, to strategically communicate the activities and concerns of the Organization with the aim of achieving the greatest public impact. To that end, the Department will continue to strive to (a) increase worldwide access to United Nations public information products and services; (b) meet the needs of its target audiences by improving the relevance, usefulness and quality of its work; and (c) promote an enhanced understanding of the work of the Organization. The present report summarizes the key findings and final outcome of the systematic evaluation of the activities conducted by the Department of Public Information.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 17 of its resolution 57/300, the General Assembly welcomed the intention of the Secretary-General to undertake, over a three-year period, a systematic evaluation of the activities of the Department of Public Information, with assistance from the Office of Internal Oversight Services. In the same paragraph, the Secretary-General was requested to report thereon to the Committee on Information on progress made in that regard. Accordingly, beginning in 2003, the Secretary-General's annual reports on the reorientation of the Department and on questions relating to information have included data related to the gradual implementation of the said evaluation project.

2. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 60/109 B, the General Assembly acknowledged the conclusion of the three-year collaborative project between the DPI and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-eighth session. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request.

II. Background

3. In line with the reform programme of the Secretary-General, a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department was carried out in 2002 by an external consultancy firm. This allowed the Department to clarify its purposes and to enhance its overall effectiveness and efficiency, resulting in a new operating model and mission statement.

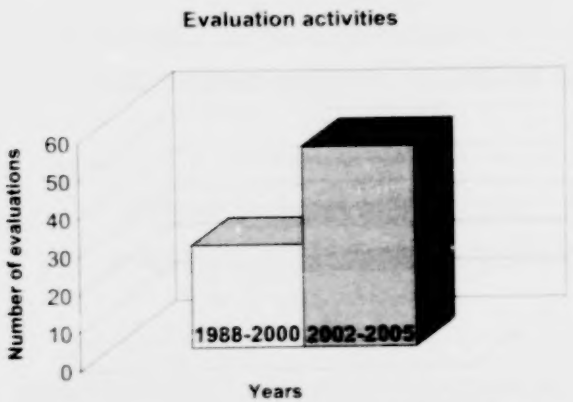
4. One of the critical recommendations of the external consultant was to institutionalize a culture of evaluation through an annual programme impact review. The Department sought the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in establishing and refining the review process over a three-year period. The overall objective of the annual programme impact review is to ensure the systematic evaluation of the impact of the main product and service lines of the Department.

5. Based on a methodological framework and an action plan proposed by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the said evaluation was undertaken in a three-phased approach. The first phase involved the conceptualization and implementation of the framework of the annual programme impact review, with a focus on the self-evaluation of programme effectiveness: departmental goals were identified and aligned with divisional objectives, and key programmes and activities were selected for impact analysis on an annual basis. The second phase entailed the adjustment of the scope of the impact review through an analysis of lessons learned. The final step encompassed designing templates for use across divisions of the Department of Public Information to standardize self-evaluation work plans and internal reporting on outcomes to the head of the Department. The Office of Internal Oversight Services facilitated the year-end "stocktaking" sessions. Collaboration with the Office was instrumental in enabling the Department to move forward in its efforts to institutionalize a culture of evaluation at all levels of its staff and management.

III. Promoting a "culture of evaluation"

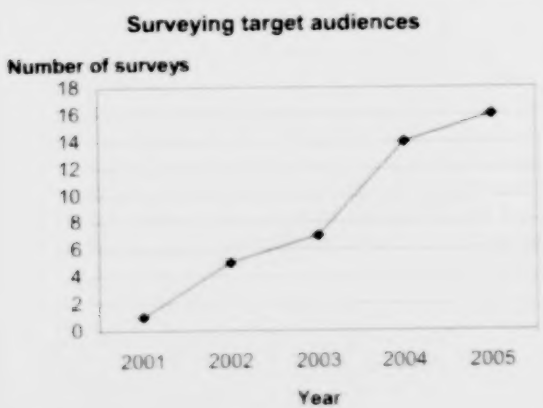
6. Since its inception in 2001, the Department has always made the creation of a culture of evaluation a cornerstone of its reorientation process. By institutionalizing systematic assessment through the annual programme impact review, the Department has sought to make self-evaluation an integral part of the daily work of programme managers. Designed as an internal mechanism for performance management, the impact review has allowed managers to determine what works and what does not, and to feed that information back into programme planning on an ongoing basis. Systematic evaluation activities have doubled since the new evaluation process has been introduced, and the number of surveys have risen four-fold (see figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1



NB. The Department of Public Information conducted its first audience research study in 1988.

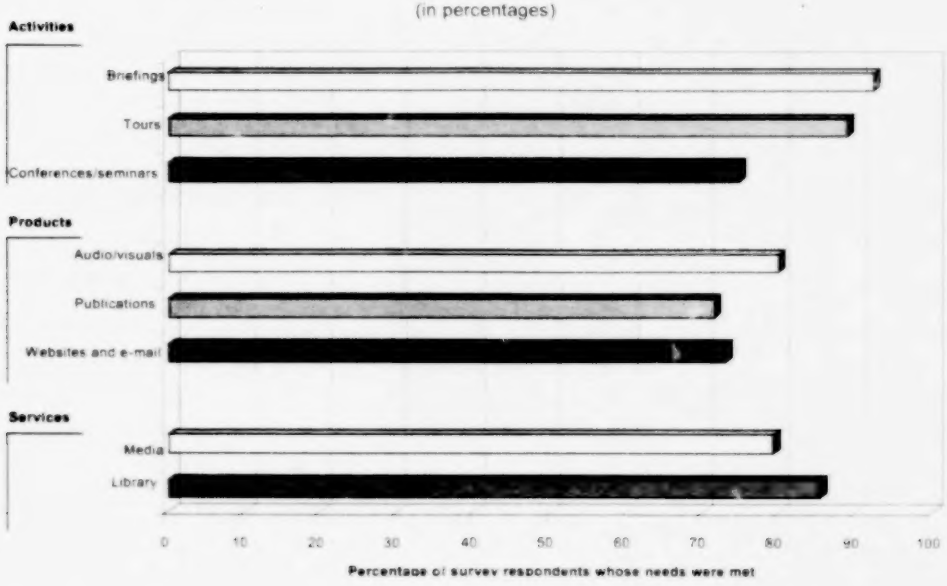
Figure 2



7. A major institutional shift has resulted in a proliferation of user surveys, enabling the Department to place more emphasis on the alignment of its work with the needs of its target audiences. Overall, the surveys demonstrate that the Department has managed to meet the demands of, on average, 80 per cent of its target audiences, in terms of usefulness, relevance and quality of Department products, activities and services (see figure 3).

Figure 3

Usefulness, relevance and quality of Department activities, products and services, 2002-2005



8. The increase in systematic assessment is also the direct result of the Department's efforts to ensure extensive training in audience research and evaluation techniques: 90 per cent of its programme managers and two thirds of professional staff at Headquarters have attended one or more training workshops. While the Department continues to face considerable challenges in ensuring adequate training for staff in the field, the importance of training in promoting a culture of evaluation was amply demonstrated by a 2005 training programme held for United Nations information centres in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of the evaluation workshop, twice as many evaluation projects were undertaken by centres in sub-Saharan Africa, as compared to United Nations information centres in all other regions.

IV. Assessing impact

9. The Department aims to support the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to the outside world in order to achieve the greatest public impact. To this end, the Department continually strives to (a) increase worldwide access to United Nations public information products and services; (b) meet the needs of its target audiences by improving the relevance, usefulness and quality of its work; and (c) promote greater understanding of the work of the Organization. Measuring the effectiveness of its work, therefore, requires focusing on these three objectives.

10. Determining the reach of United Nations information products and services through the collection of audience statistics remains the foundation for measuring the effectiveness of the work of the Department of Public Information. Different media have varying penetration by region and audience group (see figures 4 and 5) and therefore serve as complementary means to ensure the broadest possible access to information on United Nations activities.

Figure 4

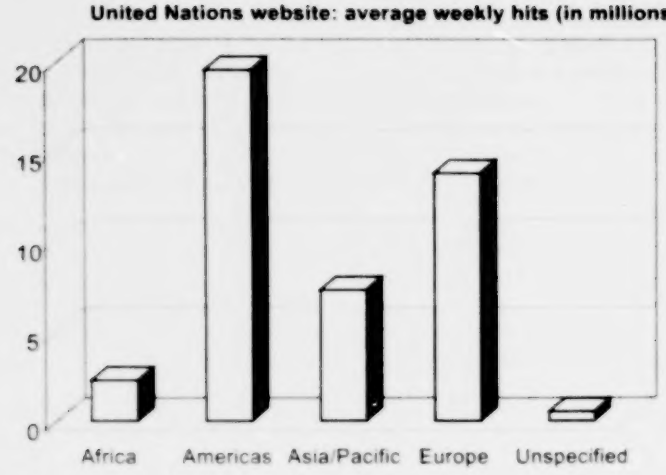
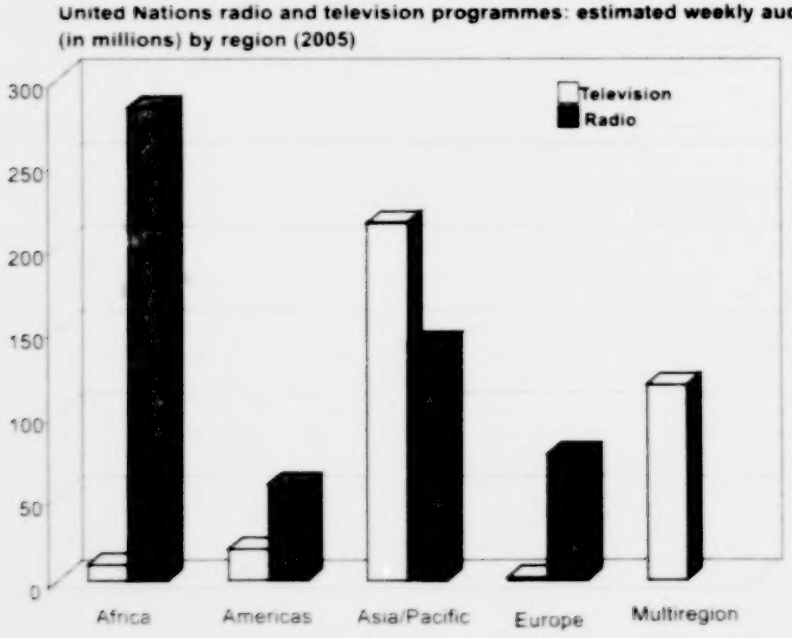


Figure 5



11. Additionally, the Department attempts to answer questions about the quality of its programmes and their usage through target audience research and user feedback. This method of gathering feedback allows the Department to determine a more precise profile of its audiences, a better understanding of their needs and, to some extent (especially in the case of "captive audiences"), an indication of how their understanding of the United Nations and its work has changed.

12. Lastly, the ultimate measurement of impact, defined as changes in attitude and social behaviour (see figure 6), cannot be addressed without tracking global public opinion on the Organization as a whole. At this level it is no longer possible to separate individual communication products and activities, but rather it is their overall effect and the work of the Organization in its entirety that is assessed. The Department of Public Information developed a programme to conduct global public opinion surveys in the late 1980s, but owing to budget constraints, the programme was ended in the early 1990s. Currently, data from public opinion polls are accessible to the Department only when they are made available on a pro bono basis.

Figure 6

Assessing the impact of public information and communications

V. Major findings

13. The reorientation process, undertaken in 2002, allowed the Department of Public Information to begin working in four main strategic directions: to create a culture of communication through client orientation; to integrate new technologies into all aspects of its work; to make full use of the resources available throughout the United Nations system by improving the coordination of public information

activities; and to strengthen partnerships to maximize global outreach. Underlying these strategic directions was the Department's commitment to assessing the results of its work and ensuring accountability through a culture of evaluation. On the basis of the three-year review of its main product and service lines, the Department has identified a set of key findings as they correspond to the strategic directions. Details on the findings follow in section VI below.

Culture of communication: a client approach

14. Feedback from journalists, as well as results of media analyses, have shown that simple and concrete messages have the greatest impact. They are most likely to be picked up and are easily translatable by the United Nations information centres, both linguistically and in terms of adaptation to a local context. By way of example, the promotion of complex and overlapping objectives, such as the eight Millennium Development Goals, makes it exceptionally challenging to ensure adequate attention by media worldwide. Client departments that provide a clear articulation of the results of their work support the Department's efforts to create an informed understanding of the United Nations. Therefore, in order to foster a culture of communication, the Department will work closely with client departments to help them refine and simplify their messages.

Increased efficiency through new technologies

15. The Department needs to further prioritize ways of increasing the access of audiences worldwide to its high-impact programmes. While human contact, such as direct personal interaction at events, is invaluable, it is not practicable to reach millions in that manner. It is therefore necessary to maximize the participation of remote audiences through the use of new technologies, such as webcasts and interactive websites, which are crucial for ensuring the widest possible inclusion of audiences worldwide. To that end, the Department has implemented interactive technologies in its effort to expand the reach of such programmes as the annual non-governmental organization conference or the seminar series on the theme "Unlearning intolerance".

16. Moreover, analyses of findings across the Department have reconfirmed the importance of students and educators as a primary user group of United Nations communications products, a trend expected to continue, in the light of the high level of digital literacy among young people. Therefore, the Department will strive to make the content and format of the United Nations website as accessible as possible to young audiences.

United Nations system-wide coordination

17. Given the fact that crises dominate the 24-hour news cycle, in order to maintain the focus on issues of persistent importance, United Nations communicators must proactively attempt to "change the conversation". System-wide coordination has promoted such initiatives as the "Ten stories the world should hear more about", launched by the Department two years ago, which represent a step in the right direction in terms of refocusing media attention on issues of international concern. The Department will implement more such initiatives in a coordinated manner, and incorporate the whole range of media tools available to it into them.

Partnerships

18. Insufficient budgetary resources have forced the Department to rely increasingly on partnerships in order to implement new activities, particularly those related to educators and youth. While the Department continues to benefit from partnerships on a pro bono basis, including to help build evaluation capacities and to provide occasional polling data, it should lead the way in ensuring systematic evaluation and polling in the United Nations system. The Department will, therefore, explore ways in which to work more closely with alternative funding sources, including through the use of trust funds, in order to supplement budgetary allocations and to increase flexibility in programme planning.

VI. Fulfilling the renewed mission of the Department of Public Information: goal-oriented evaluations

A. Reach

19. One of the Department's central goals is to reach target audiences worldwide with the Organization's messages through key intermediaries such as the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. This entails ensuring the creation and widest possible and timely distribution of news and information products on the priorities and activities of the United Nations. Therefore, the Department consistently aims to increase access of the global public to its products and activities.

20. Over the past three years, the growth and reach of key products of the Department of Public Information have included a 50 per cent increase in the subscribers to the United Nations News Centre e-mail service, and in the readership of the *UN Chronicle* print and online magazine. Newer activities have exhibited even sharper increases in reach. For example, the interactive website of the NGO annual conference witnessed a more than forty-fold increase in participants. Growth is not attributed solely to the use of new technologies, as seen by the estimated doubling of the number of radio listeners (see table).

Expanded reach of Department of Public Information products (2003-2005)

Selected Department products	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*
Annual conference of non-governmental organizations (interactive website participants)	520	1 562	21 000
News centre e-mail service (subscribers)	22 053	33 500	44 217
Guided tours (visitors)	323 169	360 157	412 042
UN Chronicle (readership, print and online)	384 620	439 420	716 997
United Nations Radio (estimated number of listeners)	133 263 150	n/a	299 095 000

B. Meeting audience needs

Radio/television

21. A survey of broadcasters of United Nations radio and television programmes was conducted to ascertain target audience needs. Conducted by more than 200 radio stations and 60 television stations, the survey determined that Department of Public Information programmes reach a weekly estimated audience of 600 million, equally divided between television and radio. Overall, the programmes are well received, considered to be of high quality and are frequently used. This represented more than double the reach estimated in 2003 when a similar survey was conducted. The growth was due, in part, to a more than 20 per cent increase in the number of partner stations. The radio language units with the most notable expansion in audience size were actively involved in promoting their own programmes. Survey results indicate that UNIFEED, a daily satellite feed of United Nations video footage, is being used by several major broadcasters, including Sky News and China Central Television. More than 97 per cent of the audience reach of two major Department television programmes is achieved by the transmission of *UN in Action*, with an estimated audience of 292 million, and *World Chronicle*, with an audience reach in all regions of approximately 8 million. Regarding *UN in Action* (a series of short television features), the survey found that a sizeable audience exists, but only some of the spots pertaining directly to specific regions are used. The survey also revealed that many broadcasters did not use the narration provided for these television programmes; in some languages, the translated narration was not used at all. This suggests the need to review the usefulness of these translations.

Annual conference of non-governmental organizations

22. The annual Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization conference, which is the premier event for the Department at Headquarters, is physically accessible only to a limited audience due to logistical and security considerations. The Department has been consistently surveying conference participants for many years because their presence at Headquarters is an important opportunity to elicit audience feedback. In the surveys, representatives of non-governmental organizations have long expressed their wish for enhanced participation. In order to expand the reach of the conference, a new interactive website was set up to allow the plenary sessions to be webcast. Subsequently, further suggestions elicited from non-governmental organization participants led to the improvement of the dedicated interactive conference website. At the conference in 2005, in addition to information and resources for participants and journalists, the website offered an online discussion forum. Online participants were able to interact with each other and ask panel speakers questions in real time. The result of the improvements was an expansion of audience size to 21,000 individuals from over 124 countries — a ten-fold increase over the previous conference.

News Centre e-mail service

23. Since April 2002, when its e-mail news service was first launched, the subscriber base of the News Centre has grown to 43,500 recipients. The News Centre has been praised as an important source of news on the United Nations. Recent user feedback has confirmed the need to significantly upgrade customization features, including the option to select stories on specific issues and geographical

regions, and to suspend subscription temporarily. It has also suggested ways of improving the service's format and delivery mechanism, and demonstrated users' interest in expanding the range of products that could be made available as an option. A substantial number of respondents, for instance, expressed interest in receiving links to audio-visual products, fact sheets on issues in the news, as well as interviews and press articles by the Secretary-General and senior United Nations officials. In addition, 25 per cent of respondents have provided content- and presentation-related comments that will be taken into account by the Department in its ongoing efforts to enhance the United Nations News Centre site and its e-mail service.

United Nations website

24. The United Nations website is the primary gateway through which audiences can have access to information about the United Nations; as such, it acts as a natural nexus for the Organization to effectively extend its reach to worldwide audiences. Given the size and complexity of the site, the search function, with an average of over 500,000 searches per month, is a primary navigation tool. The evaluation of the United Nations website concentrated on an analysis of the difficulties that users encountered in finding information. Its purpose was to improve accessibility to requested material and thereby increase the site's overall efficiency. Analysis of feedback showed that among users who did not find what they wanted, some 18 per cent were looking for country-specific information, 13 per cent for general information on the United Nations, 12 per cent were looking for documents or treaties, and 6.5 per cent were seeking employment with the Organization. Most of the respondents were students. The feedback confirmed that many users utilize highly generic search terms, as well as abbreviated words and misspellings, all of which have an adverse impact on search results.

25. On the basis of the review, a number of measures are being taken to help improve the search experience. A feedback page is available in all official languages of the United Nations. Key matches have been created in order to position web pages that are more likely to be requested for specific types of queries, as a form of "canned search". Similarly, synonyms have been created to assist in the retrieval of popular items that are difficult to spell. News focus pages have been created on the United Nations News Centre in an effort to consolidate types of content and create one-stop searches for similar types of information.

C. Raising awareness

26. Improving the understanding of key United Nations issues among target audiences worldwide, as a means of generating support for the Organization, is another key aspect of the Department of Public Information mission.

Guided tours

27. Similar to the non-governmental organization conference, guided tours designed to enhance public understanding of and support for the work of the Organization, present an opportunity to solicit feedback directly from the general public. A survey conducted last year revealed that 94 per cent of visitors stated their understanding of the United Nations had improved after taking the tour.

Additionally, respondents said that the quality of the tour was excellent, the tour guide was well informed, and that almost all visitors (98.5 per cent) would recommend the tour to others. A previous survey in 2002 had shown that 40 per cent of respondents felt that the tour offered too much information. As a result, the information provided by the guides was streamlined; consequently, 83 per cent of the respondents in the 2005 survey said that the information was "just right", while only one per cent felt that it was "too much". Furthermore, using the feedback received, the Department of Public Information has been advocating greater public access to the General Assembly and Security Council chambers. On the basis of the overall results, the Department continues, among other measures, the rigorous training of guides, including client skills and coaching to adapt the message to younger visitors, who constitute over 40 per cent of the audience.

Educational briefings by United Nations information centres

28. The network of United Nations information centres work to extend the outreach of the Department's activities around the world. The centres conducted surveys to ascertain the effectiveness of educational briefings in 2004 and 2005. A majority of respondents (85 per cent) said that the centres served as their main source of information on United Nations issues and that the information provided was not readily available elsewhere. They also noted that local language information materials were useful. Generally, respondents regarded briefing programmes as a positive and useful means of learning about the United Nations and international affairs, while indicating the need to improve materials on development issues, to make them more useful or user-friendly. Although the quality of the speakers was rated favourably overall, the Department should ensure that information centre staff at all levels are provided with the appropriate tools, training or coaching in this regard, given the central role that they play in communicating directly with the public.

"Unlearning intolerance" seminars

29. The educational series on the theme "Unlearning intolerance" was launched in 2004 by the Department in collaboration with United Nations system partners, from within existing resources, to raise awareness of intolerance and explore ways to promote respect and understanding among peoples. Webcast around the world, each of the four seminars organized to date have drawn an average of 400 participants. The importance of the issues for the media resulted in the appearance of over 550 articles in multiple languages. A survey of participants was conducted at all four seminars. Overall, 88 per cent of participants considered the seminar series useful and informative, and half of the participants thought that it was an effective forum for raising awareness about intolerance. On the basis of the continuous feedback from participants, the format of the seminars evolved to include fewer panels and panellists. Additionally, more time was allotted to question and answer sessions and audience networking.

United Nations Bookshop

30. Intended to raise the visibility of key United Nations issues while also promoting the unique products available at the United Nations Bookshop, the "Meet the author" series was launched in 2003. A stocktaking exercise to assess the effectiveness of the series revealed that on days when the events were held, sales

increased by 39 per cent and the volume of transactions was 27 per cent higher than on average days. The events also generated an increased awareness of the convenient accessibility of the Bookshop to visitors and staff, as shown by requests for future "Meet the author" events. However, the assessment found that turnout and increases in sales were not consistent for all the events reviewed. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of the sales records is needed in order to allow event organizers to make a more strategic selection of topics and authors. A survey is currently being planned for 2006 to elicit feedback on the effectiveness of promotions, the visibility of the Bookshop and the value of the in-store experience to customers.

Ten stories the world should hear more about

31. Public awareness of the scope of United Nations work depends, to a large degree, on the extent of media coverage. All too often, however, matters of vital international concern remain outside the media limelight, which tends to focus on a limited number of dramatic developments. In an effort to address this shortcoming in 2004, the Department developed an initiative that sought to capitalize on one of the media's own popular tools: a "top ten" list. The resulting project, "Ten stories the world should hear more about", aimed to stimulate media coverage of underreported issues of international importance and increase the effectiveness of the Department's media outreach efforts, in part by articulating news angles that would capture the media's attention and prompt journalists to pursue the story further.

32. Analysis of media coverage indicates that the initiative has the potential to reach wide audiences in different parts of the world, despite the regional and national variations in the volume and spread of coverage. The experience of the 2004 launch, for instance, demonstrated that major western wire services chose to ignore the event, thus reducing the chance of its coverage by local and regional outlets that rely on reports from, for example, Reuters or Associated Press. Nevertheless, despite the indifference of major news agencies, the project elicited interest from a diverse range of other media outlets, including specialized publications and broadcast programmes, as well as an array of websites, from educational institutions to non-governmental organizations and web logs (blogs). Among news agencies, the dispatches by the InterPress Service and the Congolese News Agency were picked up in a number of developing countries

33. On the basis of the first-year assessment, the Department made an effort to have United Nations information centres and United Nations agency representatives more actively involved in the subsequent launch. The planning of outreach activities also took into account the positive feedback from interviews by the head of the Department that helped to highlight the initiative in major media such as *The International Herald Tribune*, *The South China Morning Post*, PBS *NewsHour*, *CNN International*, *BBC World Service*, *Al-Jazeera* and *The Hindu*, with a subsequent ripple effect in other outlets, particularly on the Internet. "Ten stories" was featured on such major online players as Yahoo, which chose it as its "pick" of the month, and Infoplease.com, which listed condensed versions of six of what it called "the most compelling stories". According to feedback from 70 per cent of the United Nations system media focal points, the project served as a helpful promotional mechanism to highlight neglected issues. Furthermore, the initiative exemplified the centrality of cooperation among United Nations communicators for successful results: where cooperation was lacking, opportunities were lost, for example, in the

placement of opinion ("op-ed") articles. Finally, strengthened coordination with United Nations radio and television in developing related programming for broadcasters helped in further spreading the message.

D. Strategic communications

34. A primary goal of the Department is to devise effective communications strategies on priority issues, including through client orientation. In addition to targeted communications campaigns, the Department must respond to breaking news and current affairs, adapting its work programme as necessary.

Press centre in Amman: Iraq crisis

35. The evaluation of the Department's initiatives in response to the Iraq crisis and the activities of the press centre in Amman highlighted the importance of coordinated, timely messaging to the media, and of connectivity with the field in ensuring timely and relevant material, to maximize pick-up by media partners and other target audiences. The creation of the Iraq Inter-Agency Task Force ...as ensured the participation of political, humanitarian, legal and communications specialists in the development of a common public information strategy, which was instrumental in ensuring coherent and comprehensive messaging, for both direct media outreach and in generating guidelines for United Nations officials dealing with the media. These lessons fed into, and were strengthened by, the response to media criticism of the oil-for-food programme. The Department strengthened its rapid response capacity to identify and ensure replies to criticism in the media. A daily communications meeting is now held, bringing together officials from the Department, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and his spokesman, and the relevant substantive offices, to agree on responses to issues in the media and to determine coherent messaging for key media initiatives, including media placement. Additional adjustments made by the Department included regularly produced guidance for those dealing with the media on key issues, and assisting in the coordinated placement of "op-ed" articles by the Secretary-General and various senior officials to further amplify the Organization's messaging on key issues.

36. The increased media interest in taking live feeds from the Amman press centre confirmed the value of material from the field for the rapidly expanding global news market. As a result, the Department responded to this by increasing the number of field trips of its staff, within existing resources. For example, teams of staff have covered the Sudan, the tsunami disaster relief effort, the Niger food crisis, Guatemala floods, and the earthquake in Pakistan, to provide unique footage, images and audio to broadcasters. By means of new technology, audio and visual material is sent back to Headquarters in real time for inclusion in daily news programming. In addition, a task force has been established with operational agencies and peacekeeping missions to encourage and deliver more material from the field, particularly video material.

Media monitoring and analysis

37. As part of its efforts to assess the effectiveness of its communications campaigns to promote priority issues, the Department of Public Information has significantly improved the way media monitoring and impact analysis of campaigns

is conducted. The more in-depth and results-based client reports now prepared by the Department have made a deep impression on a number of client offices. Examples of media monitoring and analysis projects undertaken by the Department included coverage of the 10-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2005 World Summit. These studies showed that the Department has the capacity to influence media coverage, both in terms of favourability and pick-up. Even though the pick-up of key messages on priority themes is determined to a very large extent by external factors, the analysis showed that campaigns are able to attract favourable press coverage through message placement, the use of spokespersons and media outreach. Direct interaction with journalists was found to be the most effective way of increasing the chances of favourable coverage among articles in which messages were carried (on average 15 per cent more favourable). The coverage of issues was primarily neutral in tone (mostly news stories), with a small proportion (less than 10 per cent) equally positive and negative (opinion articles). Overall, the studies showed that proactive media outreach efforts by Department staff led to a decrease in negative media coverage.

E. Working with the media

38. The Organization's ability to bring about an effective impact necessitates the supply of logistical support, news products and other services to its pivotal intermediaries, particularly to the news media. Additionally, this entails initiating, developing and strengthening external partnerships.

1. Services to the media

Media briefings by United Nations information centres

39. Systematic surveys were conducted by the United Nations information centres to assess the utility of the information products and briefings programmes they provide to the media with a view to improving them. Surveys focused on the activities and products related to the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change issued in 2004, the 2005 World Summit, and the Millennium Development Goals. With respect to print products, on average 77 per cent of media respondents stated that they were useful, 76 per cent said press releases were useful and 44 per cent used the press releases to write a story. The Secretary-General's "op-ed" articles were deemed useful by 66 per cent of respondents, while 54 per cent indicated that they were used to write a story. A briefing on the 2005 World Summit received the highest ratings by far (92 per cent). Overall, three quarters of respondents said that information provided by the United Nations information centre was not available elsewhere or that it was better than other sources. The lowest ratings were attributed to material on the Millennium Development Goals, primarily because respondents preferred more succinct information. The finding was also reflected in the media analysis of the 2005 World Summit, which found that for communications purposes, focusing on eight different Millennium Development Goals at one time might be too ambitious, reducing the likelihood of media coverage.

40. In general, it was clear that the media appreciated the material provided, though some expressed the view that press kits contained "too much information", and that something smaller and easier to digest would be welcome. That view was also reflected in the ratings cited, where brief, concise material highlighting the main points — such as one or two page press releases, fact sheets and executive summaries of reports — were deemed most useful. Other suggestions included making information more regional or country-specific and material available in local languages. Therefore, the Department of Public Information will provide brief, concise material well in advance, so that United Nations information centres can translate and print materials more easily and more cost effectively.

Press services

41. Survey results and regular interaction with clients confirm that the timely delivery of relevant material in appropriate formats is a key factor in maximizing the utility of press services to the media and delegates. Web-based text products — the news service, press releases, media alerts — achieved growing rates of utilization and/or expressions of satisfaction. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents found the daily media alert useful or very useful, with a number expressing appreciation for its availability and regular updating on the United Nations website. Nearly 60 per cent of recipients of the media alert rated the press releases useful or very useful, with the majority using them daily or almost daily. While 70 per cent of press releases were issued within two hours of a meeting's conclusion, the survey found that there was a need for even faster production of meetings coverage. A comprehensive survey will be conducted in 2006 to obtain a more complete picture of the use of press releases, with a view to further improvements to the product. Press releases in hard copy were not as useful to respondents; therefore, the Department will review that product further in order to decide whether there exists a viable means of cost savings in this regard. Respondents also commented on the usefulness of the Media Documents Centre and expressed great satisfaction with the helpfulness of its staff.

Networked interactive content access

42. In an effort to continuously improve the timeliness of its media products, the Department introduced networked interactive content access, a new system that provides a central photo retrieval resource for all internal users and a batch delivery system for selected wire agencies. A survey of the major photo news agencies showed full satisfaction with the quality and objectivity of United Nations photos. There is a conscious prioritization of work in the selection/ingestion of digital photos into the system so that the turnaround time of the news photos can be minimized. The timeliness of photo delivery continues to improve, with most news photographs delivered within three hours of an event. According to the survey results, clients would like delivery to be even faster. The full potential of the investment in the system will be realized when the front-end web application, offering searchable high-resolution images with detailed statistics of the download activities, is acquired.

2. Partnerships

43. The Department aims to establish new partnerships with media organizations worldwide, while maintaining the existing ones. Fostering a system of partnerships

is fundamental to the objective of allowing multiple target audiences access to United Nations communications.

International Television Programme Market

44. One avenue through which the Department of Public Information has made the most of partnerships is International Television Programme Market (MIP TV), the largest international television programming market in the industry in which over 12,000 representatives from the world's television programme providers participate. The crucial presence of the United Nations system at this event has raised the visibility of its "brand" to the world's media decision makers. The Organization's united presence at the event has allowed United Nations broadcasting professionals to reach the world's media in one place at one time. More exposure has resulted in an increase in distribution, as well as in co-production partnerships, many of which started at the event and have developed through regular follow-up. Two significant results from the presence of the United Nations at the market were the financing of a documentary on the United Nations entitled, "Workshop for Peace", and the International Emmy Awards for HIV/AIDS coverage.

45. The participation of the audio-visual components of the United Nations system under the leadership of the Department of Public Information has doubled every year since it first attended MIP TV in 2002, culminating in 2005, with the presence of 13 organizations and 30 representatives. The *AV e-news* subscriber base has grown from 100 recipients (solely United Nations broadcasters) to approximately 13,000 recipients.

Global Media AIDS Initiative

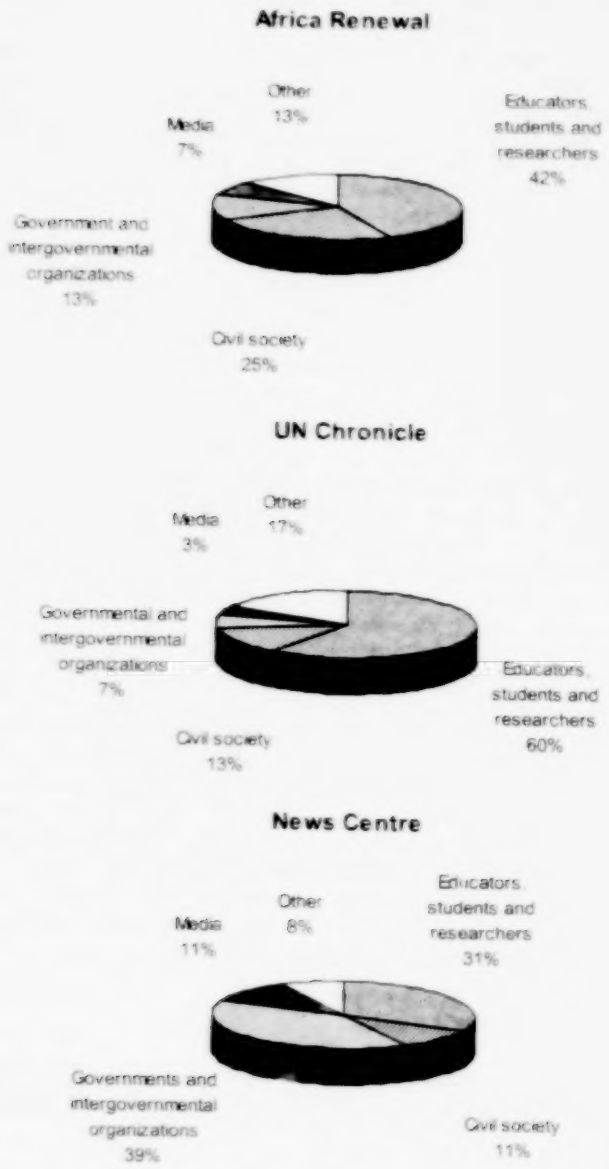
46. The Department of Public Information, in collaboration with the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Gates Foundation and UNAIDS played a critical role in the creation and evolution of the Global Media AIDS Initiative, by helping to organize its founding session at Headquarters in January 2004, hosting a brainstorming session with leading media companies at Headquarters in November 2004, and a second high-level meeting during the MIP TV convention in Cannes in April 2005. Efforts by the Department helped galvanize major broadcasters to increase their AIDS awareness initiatives, to collaborate more closely with each other and to make rights-free resources available to developing countries. The initiative has spawned regional and international collaboration, such as the Russian Media Partnership to Combat HIV/AIDS, an African Broadcast Media Partnership to Combat HIV/AIDS (representing broadcasters from more than 20 countries) and increased messaging by international broadcasters, such as MTV of Viacom. The partnership encompasses 131 companies from 62 countries carrying HIV-prevention messages, which were broadcast to a potential audience of 1.3 billion people. Praised as "unequalled in the history of public service broadcasting" in a major news outlet commentary, the initiative conveyed the message that public education through mass media could reduce HIV infection rates by two thirds.

F. Working with educators and youth

47. A primary aim of the Department is to use educational outreach to involve children and youth, in the issues and concerns of the United Nations. The

Department must engage the younger generation in the discussion of solutions to global problems, to stimulate opinion, debate and policy formulation through efforts targeted directly at the public, in collaboration with key educational partners. Innovative educational outreach is possible by drawing upon knowledge about diverse Department audiences (see Figure 7), thus allowing for increased understanding, meeting target audience needs and improving access to key audiences.

Figure 7



UN Chronicle

48. The *UN Chronicle*, which has been re-conceived as one of the Department's key vehicles for educational outreach, conducted a comprehensive cost-benefit review of its six-language editions with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The purpose of the review was to compare the costs of the magazine's current production of print (all six official languages) and online (French and English) versions to the costs of a scenario in which the print versions were eliminated and online versions would be produced in all six official languages. The analysis also took into consideration that the English and French editions reach nearly 97 per cent of the magazine's worldwide readership, with the remaining 3 per cent divided among Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish readers. The English edition accounts for 72 per cent while the French edition comprises 25 per cent of all readers. Furthermore, the online readership of both the English and French editions has nearly doubled over the past two years. The review ascertained that the regional distribution and sales of the four co-published print editions of the magazine in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish were not commensurate with the costs involved. Serious thought is being given to their discontinuation. The distribution and re-dissemination of the English and French language editions and contents in print and online, however, have been successful, with article citations, online reprints and article page views showing growth and outreach, in particular to educators and students. The review concluded that the cost of producing online versions of the magazine in all six official languages, despite the projected benefit of enhancing the reach of the languages version currently available only in print, would exceed the cost of its current production. The review underlines the importance of supporting multilingualism with adequate resources in order to provide readers in all official languages with equal access to the Department's flagship publication.

UN Works

49. Originally designed as a documentary series for cable television in order to attract a younger audience, the "What's going on?" series featured the stories of ordinary people who benefited from the work of the United Nations. After the series received the American Library Association's "Most notable video for young adults" award, the Department began promoting it among teachers groups as a programme aimed at educators and non-governmental organizations dealing with educational topics. Given that classroom curricula generally do not include international topics, a need existed to create a competitive and valuable product that would encourage teachers to discuss global issues. It has been commended by teachers as a means of sensitizing youth in the developed world about youth in the developing world, allowing students to grow culturally and globally. After the initial launch of the series, feedback from teachers and educational groups stressed the need for complementary tools, such as lesson plans and worksheets, to make the series easier to use in the classroom. In response to their feedback, a companion website was set up and other educational outreach products are currently being developed in collaboration with the distributor of the series.

NGO annual conference

50. Further to the surveys of participants in the Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization annual conference (see para. 22), the Department received additional feedback from non-governmental organization representatives requesting that participation of youth organizations and individuals throughout the annual conference process be increased. At the 2005 conference, a conscious effort was made to encourage the input of younger members of non-governmental organizations in the design of the conference, the interactive website and its maintenance, the selection of speakers and the conference summaries. In addition, young people participated in the plenary session and in the midday interactive workshops, three of which were oriented towards issues affecting them. The Department plans to continue to involve young people in its annual conferences.

G. Coordination and client orientation

51. Internal coordination and client orientation are central goals of the Department's work insofar as they provide the basis for the Department to develop more effective United Nations communication strategies. Internal coordination demands that synergies be enhanced within the Department, with client departments and United Nations system partners. In addition to the client planning process on communications outreach activities, the Department provides an array of other services to United Nations system offices.

United Nations Communications Group

52. Established on a weekly inter-agency coordinating meeting initiated at Headquarters in 1998 by the current Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Communications Group was formed by the heads of information of United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes in 2002. Its utility as a coordinating body is demonstrated by its growing membership, which has increased by 35 per cent since its inception, and by its rising ratings: in 2005, eight in 10 members stated that the Group made an important contribution to their communications work, compared to 75 per cent in 2003.

53. The United Nations Communications Group continues to maximize coordination on communications activities in order to minimize duplicate and competing media outreach events. Although a system-wide calendar of media events has reduced the number of overlapping activities, longer lead times in planning events would guarantee preferred dates for every outreach activity without disrupting or postponing other events. Coordination enhancements include regular summaries of consultations with senior officials and discussions at weekly meetings and the annual conference, which are issued as communication policy guidelines to all Group members. The summaries enable the United Nations to "speak with one voice" by providing factual, to-the-point guidance on communications issues affecting the Organization as a whole.

Client orientation

54. Collaboration through the client planning process has become a cornerstone of the Department's mission to strategically communicate the activities and concerns of the Organization in order to achieve the greatest public impact. The client planning process has produced effective communications strategies and greater interdepartmental coordination. It has been instrumental in fostering a culture of communication among substantive departments, which have recognized that their activities can benefit from including communications in their planning process and which clearly appreciate the added value of Department services. As a result of regular exchanges between Department focal points and their counterparts, mutual confidence has grown, constructive feedback is consistently received, and a consensus has emerged on the importance of identifying thematic communication priorities and developing more focused messaging. Further efforts are now needed to streamline the number and type of issues to be promoted and thus optimize the use of limited resources.

55. Surveys show that 75 per cent of clients are fully satisfied at the end of communication campaigns with regard to strategies, information materials, media outreach and overall collaboration with the Department of Public Information. Measuring client satisfaction has been helpful in institutionalizing the planning process and facilitating ongoing dialogue between the Department and its clients; however, some refinements to the method of collecting feedback still need to be implemented. By definition, client satisfaction provides only an indirect indication of the effectiveness of communication campaigns. The Department is therefore moving towards greater emphasis on evaluation techniques, such as media analysis and direct surveys of target audiences.

Graphic design services

56. The Department's graphic design services are charged with creating visual products for communications purposes. In order to improve the quality and efficiency of these services and to determine their competitive value, a survey of over 200 clients was conducted. Respondents rated graphic design services highly, a positive indication of coherent decision-making and communication between the unit and clients. Survey results showed that most clients (86 per cent) were satisfied with the final product. Over 90 per cent of clients expressed satisfaction with the designers and indicated that they would work with the same designer again. The Department learned that more than half of the clients would pay for services "if charged a nominal fee", which the Department is considering exploring to maintain high quality standards through the ongoing acquisition of advanced design software.

Library services

57. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library facilitates access to timely and up-to-date information materials and services for use by delegates, permanent missions of Member States, the Secretariat, researchers and depository libraries worldwide. With the objective of improving user services, the Library has used surveys to gather feedback from its users on the level and speed of access to information. The 2005 survey indicates that there is a large number of potential Library users who may still be unaware of the full range of its resources; nevertheless, the satisfaction rate among users remains very high, with over 92 per cent of them expressing

satisfaction with the Library's materials and services. The Library has demonstrated its responsiveness by overhauling its website, inviting external service providers to training programmes and publicizing training programmes more widely. Additionally, the Library has redefined its role in order to help permanent missions and staff deal with a large volume of information and constantly changing technologies through direct support services as part of a knowledge management initiative. This new initiative is one of the ways in which the Library has worked to increase its responsiveness to user needs.

Personal knowledge management

58. Launched as a pilot programme, the knowledge management initiative included selective outreach to United Nations staff in order to identify clients' information needs and provide personalized training programmes. A survey of participants in the pilot programme revealed that 90 per cent considered it a useful initiative, and that, 8 in 10 would recommend to others. On the training they received, one quarter of participants were educated in information resources previously unknown to them, while another quarter acquired advanced knowledge of tools used everyday, 60 per cent said it contributed positively to their daily work. The evaluation indicated that a more focused approach was needed to target user groups more systematically and ensure rapid follow-up. Based on this initial feedback, the Library is further refining its programme before making it available to a wider user base.

Daily press clippings

59. The Department monitors world news on a daily basis and provides press clippings to United Nations officials. Beginning in July 2004, the original paper-based clippings service has been replaced by a database-driven e-mail delivery system. Since the system's launch, the productivity of the service has tripled with respect to volume of clippings and number of subscribers, resulting in annual savings of approximately $16,000. In one survey, 98 per cent of subscribers praised the timeliness of the revamped clippings service, 80 per cent found the service easy to use, 75 per cent stated that the coverage of news topics had improved. Based on the feedback from subscribers, the electronic database will be upgraded and new features added.

VII. Conclusion

60. The public perception of the United Nations, like the image of any public institution, is the sum total of views held in the public mind. In the past two years, the picture in many people's minds of the United Nations has acquired a negative cast, reflecting the way in which the Organization has been portrayed in the international media. Public opinion polling results and media studies have shown the correlation between an awareness of negative news on the United Nations and poor ratings of the Organization, whereas slightly more favourable opinions correspond with lower levels of negative press coverage (Zogby America, February 2005; Better World Campaign, October 2005).

61. A number of polls conducted in the past two years show that support for the Organization, and understanding about its global role have faltered around the

world, particularly in countries in which negative media coverage has been prominent. However, polls also show that most people around the world want a United Nations that is stronger and more capable of living up to their expectations. Furthermore, global polling data confirm the public's belief that the Organization is central to solving world conflicts (Gallup "Voice of the People", October 2005; PIPA/Gallup in Africa, June 2005; Zogby America, May 2005).

62. While the image of the United Nations has been badly bruised largely owing to scandal-driven media coverage, the Organization is still regarded as an important public institution. As the communications arm of the Organization, the Department of Public Information seeks to focus the media on issues of concern to the United Nations. Though the Department has no illusions about its capacity to counteract much of the negative coverage of the Organization, it has reinforced its media outreach capacity to better tell the United Nations story, to respond to criticism and to promote awareness of the Organization's achievements in other areas. As a result, the Department has been able, to some extent, to offset unfavourable media reports (for example, in a recent study of press coverage on the 2005 World Summit, the Department's global media outreach and other efforts to promote the Summit agenda helped to bring about favourable messages, which appeared in 20 per cent of the total press coverage).

63. It is clear that the Department of Public Information must consistently evaluate its programmes and activities on an ongoing basis in order to cope with, and adapt to, the challenges of a rapidly changing international context. The Department's senior managers now understand that assessing the impact of the effectiveness of United Nations communications activities is not an option, but rather the foundation for remaining responsive to the needs of worldwide audiences. Without effective evaluation, there cannot be effective communication. The efforts described above will therefore continue beyond the successful conclusion of the three-year review.

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Activities of the Department of Public Information

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The changes introduced by the Department of Public Information over the past four years as part of the Secretary-General's reform initiatives have fundamentally changed the way the Department defines its mission and carries out its activities. The work of the Department is now driven by three strategic choices: achieving greater effectiveness in its communications work through targeted delivery, making enhanced use of the new information and communications technologies in all areas of its work and building an expanded grass-roots support base through partnerships with civil society organizations. The present report, prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 60/109 B, summarizes the key advances made in the past six months (from July 2005 to February 2006) in each of the above areas.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 9 of its resolution 60/109 B, the General Assembly took note of the proposals and actions of the Secretary-General to improve the effective and targeted delivery of public information activities, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and decisions of the Assembly, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-eighth session.

2. In several other paragraphs of resolution 60/109 B, the General Assembly called on the Department of Public Information to provide specific information on a number of its activities. In consultation with the Bureau of the Committee on Information, it was decided that the information requested by the Assembly would be combined and clustered around five thematic areas. The first four reports therefore address requests for information on such specific areas as the activities and new strategic directions of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2006/1), the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries (A/AC.198/2006/2), the United Nations website with regard to progress towards parity among the official languages (A/AC.198/2006/3) and the assessment of the effectiveness of United Nations public information products and activities (A/AC.198/2006/4). The present report, the fifth one, covers the overall activities of the Department and provides information on the remaining areas for which the Assembly requested information. Unless otherwise noted, the report covers the period from July 2005 to February 2006.

II. Effective and targeted delivery of public information activities

3. The measures introduced by the Department over the past four years as part of the Secretary-General's reform initiatives have fundamentally changed the way the Department defines its mission and carries out its activities. The changes have created a new strategic orientation that emphasizes a closer working relationship with the substantive departments and offices of the Secretariat and the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in developing information material and campaigns that advance the substantive objectives of the Organization. New information and communications technologies have been introduced and integrated at all levels of the Department's work, including the network of information centres, with a view to increasing productivity and speeding up the delivery of its products and services. The Department has forged new and stronger partnerships with civil society, educational institutions and the public and private sectors to maximize its global outreach.

A. 2005 World Summit

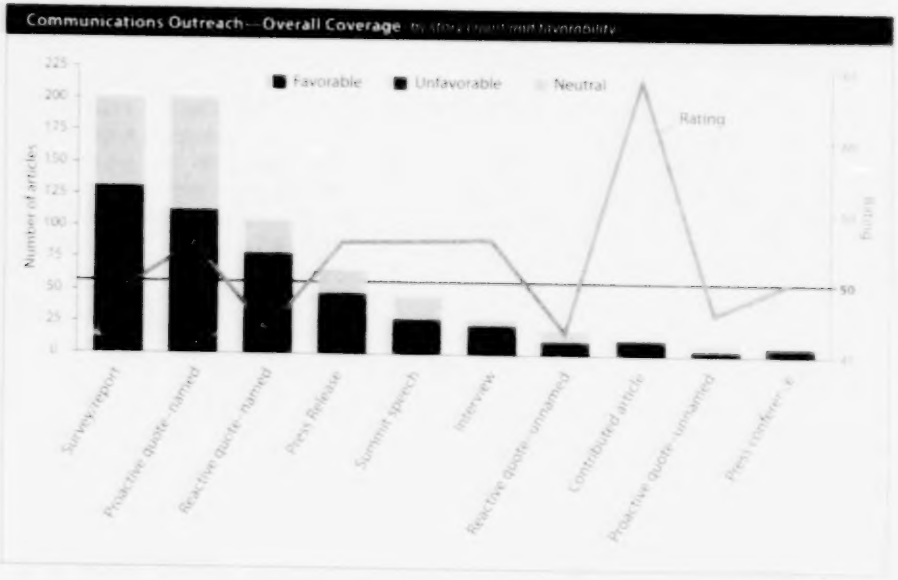
4. During 2005, the United Nations has again been at the centre of intense media attention and debate. Such controversial issues as the oil-for-food programme and allegations of mismanagement in other areas have continued to reverberate in the press. At the same time, the Organization has been seen as central to the international response to several natural disasters around the world, in particular the South-East Asian tsunami and the earthquake in South Asia, to the feared avian flu

pandemic and to such issues of current importance as the inquiry into the assassination of the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri, and the dispute over the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The 2005 World Summit, which was held at United Nations Headquarters in September 2005, in particular its agenda of reform and revitalization, has fostered a lively debate in media in all regions of the world about the role, relevance and future of the Organization.

5. The 2005 World Summit provided an historic opportunity for Member States to come together and take action on grave global threats requiring bold global solutions. Promoting the Summit, with its complex, ambitious and often controversial agenda, was both a challenge and an opportunity for the Department. Building on the successful communications campaign in the lead-up to the Summit, which was summarized in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/60/173), the Department launched a coordinated effort to bring the Summit Outcome to the media's attention in the quickest and most effective manner. So as to keep pace with developments, the Department updated media materials as they were being drafted and designed and contacted the world press for interviews with senior United Nations officials. As many as 125 interviews and background briefings were set up by the Department between August and mid-September (see figure I below). Close cooperation was maintained among departments, within the Department, and with the Office of the Secretary-General. With the benefit of updated materials and regular guidance from New York, the information centres actively contributed to the communications campaign. Rapid response extended to the Summit itself. A two-page fact sheet highlighting tangible achievements was distributed on the second day of the Summit and brought immediate attention to what had been accomplished, as opposed to what needed further action.

Figure 1

During 2005, the United Nations faced wide-ranging public attacks and allegations on several fronts, inevitably compromising the promotion of the 2005 World Summit agenda. Based on clippings culled from 71 publications judged to be among the most influential at regional and global levels, the Department, with the help of an independent consultant, has reviewed the quantitative and qualitative value of its work with the media. The consultant judged that the proactive efforts of the United Nations communications team produced a discernible overall positive impact in the global media. The review shows that when United Nations spokespersons were provided the opportunity to speak directly to the media on substantive issues, the Organization was depicted in a more positive light.



6. Media interest at the time of the Summit was very high. Over 3,000 journalists were accredited by the Department for daily coverage of the Summit. In order to ensure adequate service for such a large group, the Department developed an innovative and very successful media liaison programme that benefited from the assistance of more than 200 graduate student volunteers. A media centre was also set up and facilities offered for broadcast transmissions. Demand for the use of audio transmission facilities was the highest ever, with Radio France Internationale (France); Catalunya Radio (Spain); RCN Radio (Colombia); WMCA Radio (United

States of America), RAI (Italy) and RTE (Ireland) among those stations that took advantage of the facilities. The Department also carried out its regular coverage activities, with additional programming and material. Over 20 press conferences and briefings during the three-day Summit were covered on live TV, webcast, and in photo and text products. The webcast received over 85,000 live views from over 125 countries during the three days, with many more viewers accessing archived materials.

7. On the opening day of the Summit, United Nations Radio co-produced a prime-time two-hour special live broadcast with China National Radio on its flagship news channel. For the first time ever, the world's largest radio network devoted an entire two-hour listening period to United Nations issues. United Nations Radio also provided direct broadcasts of the statements of many world leaders to their respective national broadcast networks. Special interviews were also conducted with various Heads of State and Government. For example, an exclusive interview with an African Head of State, the first and only one granted to the international media since his taking office, was quoted and used by a number of key international broadcasters, among them the BBC, Africa N° 1, Radio Canada International and Agence France Presse. For the first time, the Department was responsible for the group photo of world leaders and succeeded in placing it in global media.

8. In an innovative approach to informing New Yorkers and visitors to the city about the Summit, the Department launched an advertising campaign, with the theme "Everyone's a Delegate". The ads, which began on 29 August and ran for well over a month, were shown in 1,000 subway cars and 1,000 bus interiors, at 250 Long Island railway and Metro North train stations, 51 dioramas at New York area airports and 90 telephone kiosks in Manhattan. The Department also created a two-minute video that ran pro bono every hour starting in early September on the Panasonic screen in Times Square. Four 30-second television spots featured a typical New Yorker addressing the General Assembly about important issues on the Summit agenda. The spots ran from 8 to 16 September on Time Warner cable channels, WNBC and WABC. Though the campaign was local, articles and news reports about it appeared around the world, thereby confirming its value as a public information tool.

9. After the Summit, the Department immediately shifted its attention to keeping the world informed about the implementation of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 60/1. In December, after the General Assembly had approved the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Department prepared background materials and arranged for a press briefing to be given by the President of the Assembly. Media advisories were also distributed to the information centres, keeping them abreast of the key issues surrounding the Commission and its mandate. The Department is continuing to inform the world media of every new development relating to the implementation of the Summit Outcome.

10. Also in follow-up to the World Summit, the Department repackaged the publication *Sixty Ways the United Nations Makes a Difference*, and released it as a photo essay at the Summit in recognition of the sixtieth anniversary. In addition to being issued at Headquarters in the six official languages, 21 information centres published the booklet in 23 local languages, including Armenian, Bangla, Czech, Danish, Farsi, Finnish, Icelandic, Japanese and Kiswahili.

B. Thematic communications campaigns

World Summit on the Information Society

11. Faced with a groundswell of controversy on Internet governance issues, the Department of Public Information worked with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to promote and explain to the world media the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis in mid-November 2005. An electronic press kit was posted on the World Summit on the Information Society website, followed by press releases and media advisories and carefully targeted media interviews with ITU officials. A fact sheet was produced and circulated to clarify the options being considered to augment the current state of Internet governance. A post-Summit evaluation of more than 100 media items (see figure 2 below) revealed a mostly balanced coverage of three pre-selected messages: the importance of overcoming the digital divide; the value of a broad-based stakeholders approach to Internet governance; and the quality of freedom of expression as essential for the information society. It also showed reaction ranging from relief to satisfaction with the negotiated governance outcome. Another positive Summit event was the gathering of 300 broadcast executives in Tunis at a World Electronic Media Forum, organized in association with the Department and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which endorsed the principles of the information society and support for the Millennium Development Goals.

Figure 2

Presence of key information Summit messages
Bridging the Digital Divide
Stakeholders Approach to Internet Governance
Freedom of Expression
Number of Hits
Source: UN DPI Development Section

12. The Department also organized two live video Internet chats during the World Summit on the Information Society to demonstrate the benefits of using such low-cost technology to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world. The first video chat featured students in Cameroon, England, France and Kenya discussing the challenges girls face in secondary education. The second video chat included teachers who had gathered at six information centres in Africa (Bujumbura, Dakar, Nairobi, Ouagadougou, Pretoria and Yaounde) to discuss information and communications technologies and cultural diversity. The two events, both conducted by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, generated a keen interest on the part of other information centres, in both the technology and the possibility of hosting future interactions.

Top Ten Stories

13. "Ten Stories the World Should Hear More About", a Department outreach initiative now in its second year, has demonstrated the potential to reach sizeable audiences in different parts of the world and help to draw media attention to important international developments and issues that often remain underreported. The project elicited interest from a diverse range of media outlets, including specialized publications and broadcast programmes, as well as an array of websites, from educational institutions to non-governmental organizations and weblogs (blogs). Among news agencies, the dispatches by the InterPress Service and the Congolese News Agency were reprinted in a number of developing countries, with particularly strong pick-up in the Arabic language press. Moreover, the initiative was featured on such major online players as Yahoo, which chose it as its pick of the month, and Infoplease.com, which highlighted six of what it called "the most compelling stories". Outreach efforts through a series of op-ed pieces and interviews helped to highlight the initiative in *The International Herald Tribune*, *The South China Morning Post*, PBS's NewsHour, CNN International and *The Hindu*, with subsequent ripple effects in other outlets, in particular on the Internet.

Box 1

Commenting on the Department's *Top Ten Stories*, a blogger wrote that the stories should be "compulsory topics for media coverage and national debate ... and [they should be] asking the question, 'What are we going to do about them'?" (http://now.rickeyre.com).

The Millennium Development Goals

14. Spurred by the five-year review by the General Assembly of the Millennium Development Goals, the ongoing efforts of Professor Jeffrey Sachs and the Millennium Project, the anti-poverty orientation of the G8 meeting and the controversies at the 2005 World Summit, the Millennium Development Goals received growing global attention. The Department worked with other United Nations agencies, the Millennium Project, and the non-governmental organizations affiliated with the Millennium Campaign to coordinate and harmonize messages and take advantage of opportunities for promotion. A major project of the Department was the publication in three languages, and the later reprinting, of an innovatively designed and illustrated Millennium Development Goals progress report, based on the most comprehensive and up-to-date statistics ever made available on the topic. The statistics were collected and processed by a working group of statisticians from 20 United Nations agencies and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Human rights

15. The Department continued to support the promotion of human rights and the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the work of the human rights committees and the special rapporteurs. It facilitated media contacts, press briefings and produced public information materials, including an

English-French press kit, jointly produced with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights. More than 160 stories on the Commission were featured during its session, with coverage by media outlets from all continents, including BBC, Al-Jazeera, *The New York Times*, *The Jakarta Post* and *Sudan Tribune*. The observance of Human Rights Day continued to be an important element in the Department's efforts to promote human rights.

Question of Palestine

16. In addition to the promotion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Department organized its annual training programme for Palestinian media practitioners. Ten young television and radio journalists, including six women, participated in the 2005 programme from October to December 2005 and received skills training in radio programming and television production. Working under communications professionals in the Department, each was able to file stories and interviews on the Palestinian issue from Headquarters, offering their listeners and readers a perspective that would not otherwise be readily available to them. In its 10-year history, the programme has helped improve the skills of 96 Palestinian journalists.

Box 2

Al-Jazeera television network, which broadcast a special report on the 2005 training programme, described it as "one of the most important opportunities available to young professionals from the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

New Partnership for Africa's Development

17. The Department of Public Information found new opportunities to promote New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Africa's blueprint for development, and to give greater visibility to the United Nations support for its implementation. In June, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Department organized and carried out a campaign to publicize the main findings and recommendations of the advisory panel of the Secretary-General on international support for NEPAD in 2005. The story was picked up by *The New York Times*, Associated Press and a score of other publications and media outlets worldwide, in particular in Africa and Asia. The Department also used various other means to reach targeted audiences, including direct mailings. Stories on the goals, challenges and achievements of NEPAD appeared regularly in the Department's quarterly magazine, *Africa Renewal/Afrique Renouveau*, which reaches a combined audience of some 33,000, including viewers of its website (www.un.org/AR). This year, an innovative feature, "NEPAD monitor", regularly highlights new progress. Many of these articles were also published in daily newspapers in Africa and Asia, and on major Africa-interest websites (allAfrica.com and Afrik.com, among others), which greatly expanded the reach and influence of United Nations materials.

Box 3

In December 2005, a former president of a country in Africa wrote to the Department requesting he continue to receive the publication *Africa Renewal*. He asked that his address be updated and his title be changed to "former President".

C. Outreach to civil society

Partnership with non-governmental organizations

18. In its efforts to improve the quality of information available to over 1,500 non-governmental organizations associated with the Department and to make this information more easily accessible to them, the Department has introduced several additional components to its existing information programmes, weekly non-governmental organization briefings, communications workshops and annual Department of Public Information/NGO conference, over the past six months. A summary of each briefing is now disseminated to non-governmental organizations and is also webcast. Summaries, webcasts and briefing photos are available for reference on the Department's Non-Governmental Organizations Section website (www.un.org/dpi/ngosection), which has been redesigned to offer more user-friendly and up-to-date information. Ad hoc briefings on current topics by senior United Nations officials, such as on the Volcker report and the aftermath of the earthquake in South Asia, were introduced to follow the main briefing panel discussion each week. In order to strengthen its partnership with its associated non-governmental organizations, the Department arranged a town hall meeting and communications workshop in December 2005. As a result, a joint communications strategy is now being developed for the 59th annual Department of Public Information/NGO Conference, scheduled for 6 to 8 September 2006.

Educational outreach

19. Connecting with students and teachers remains a cornerstone of the Department's outreach efforts. By using a variety of tools, including electronic communications via the Internet, meeting with remote partners through live webcasts and videoconferences and enhancing partnerships with educational institutions, the Department increasingly finds itself well inside the classroom. Through its Global Teaching and Learning project and accompanying CyberSchoolBus website, the Department has developed new and innovative approaches to learning about the United Nations. With funding from the United Nations Development Programme Millennium Campaign, CyberSchoolBus has launched the Millennium Development Goals youth site, the most comprehensive website on the Millennium Development Goals for users 25 years of age and under, featuring cutting-edge interactive maps, personal stories relating to each goal and an innovative user-based content area where young people can submit their own stories, multimedia artwork, essays and interviews. CyberSchoolBus also organized the 2005 student observance of the International Day of Peace. The event, attended by over 600 students, featured videoconference presentations of conflict-resolution projects initiated by young people around the world.

20. The *UN Chronicle*, issued in the six official languages, and its online version, are now used as a primary source for many United Nations-related assignments. *UN Chronicle e-Alert*, a regular, thematic e-publication aimed primarily at the educational community, provides links to articles from the *UN Chronicle*, as well as to relevant educational and informational resources. According to a recent Google search, the magazine and its articles have been referred to in nearly 80,000 instances outside the United Nations own server; it is also reproduced and redisseminated on such services as Lexis-Nexis Executive.

Box 4

According to DePaul University's representative to the United Nations, the articles in the *UN Chronicle* provide "the needed global perspective, stimulate academic research and service projects, and inspire a multitude of actions that faculty and students can take to participate in the international community, both in international corporations and civil society institutions".

21. The Department's UN Works programme carried out another educational initiative in collaboration with the Smithsonian Museum and the National Museum of Australia. In "Talk-back classroom", a media forum, students from New York debated global issues with students from Australia via satellite hook-up. On 27 October 2005, the students interviewed the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information and leading journalists on issues related to the United Nations in the world today. The UN Works programme also collaborated with the United States-based MTV Network to produce a one-hour documentary about the impact of the earthquake in Pakistan.

Messengers of Peace

22. United Nations Goodwill Ambassadors and Messengers of Peace, working with the cooperation and guidance of the Department, continued to help raise public awareness and focus media attention on United Nations priority areas. Five of the Messengers (Vijay Amritraj, Michael Douglas, Jane Goodall, Elie Wiesel and Anna Cataldi) were featured in public service announcements to promote the Millennium Development Goals. The Messengers also contributed by keeping media attention on the victims of natural disasters in 2005 in three separate visits to the tsunami-affected areas and through fund-raising efforts for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, as well as by assisting in the media outreach strategy for the 2005 World Summit. Four of them held a press conference on the Summit Outcome, focusing on their areas of advocacy.

Exhibitions

23. The exhibitions organized by the Department of Public Information are free and accessible to the nearly one million visitors who pass through the Public Lobby at Headquarters each year. In 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Department produced a comprehensive historical exhibition with complete captions and chronology for use by educators, historians and the general public.

Another exhibition, created in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, dealt with the Holocaust. Photographic exhibitions related to the seminar series, "Unlearning Intolerance", were also mounted in the Public Lobby. The visitors' experience was expanded through exhibits of art, photography, sculpture and artifacts representing the culture of indigenous peoples, folk art from Brazil and Haiti and, reflecting the spirit of the East, a view of natural heritage sites in China and Japan. Two exhibitions dealing with the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons were inaugurated during the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, held in May 2005. Several hundred survivors of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 came to the exhibit site at Headquarters and many spent time speaking with visitors about their life experiences. There were several other exhibitions that dealt with contemporary themes.

Box 5

United Nations exhibits often elicit strong emotional responses. This is how one guest commented on the Holocaust exhibit:

> "Thank you for bringing this very moving exhibition to the United Nations. To say it moved me deeply would be to trivialize its importance. We all need to learn that we are our brothers' keepers and accept and act on our responsibility to protect our fellow human beings, regardless of race or persuasion."

D. Services to the media

24. The Department has continued to improve and expand its delivery of news products and services targeted to the media in all parts of the world. Client surveys carried out in the past year show a high degree of satisfaction with the Department's radio, video, photo, print and web-based products, while at the same time indicating ways in which these services could be further enhanced, many of which the Department has taken steps to address.

25. Improved and expanded web-based delivery of services to the media and to other target audiences remains a priority for the Department. A new press release web page, launched in early 2006, provides direct and quick access to coverage of intergovernmental meetings and other United Nations activities from the United Nations home page. The page increases the search capability of these resources and includes links to the media pages of United Nations offices at Headquarters and overseas. A survey of media clients at Headquarters reflected the desire for more timely releases, even though the Department met its target of making 70 per cent of the releases available within two hours of a meeting. To help address this, Security Council and General Assembly statements are now posted on the Internet in batches to provide media and other clients with the material they need, well in advance of issuing the final press release at the completion of meetings.

26. The Department has undertaken a number of initiatives to better service all journalists working at Headquarters, including those seeking temporary accreditation. The daily Media Alert, which is also available to delegation press attachés, is now available on the Web, providing links to background information, and is regularly updated. The Department is now developing a fully web-based online accreditation and notification system. It has also developed an intensive briefing programme, United Nations 101, for visiting foreign journalists, in cooperation with the Foreign Press Center of the United States Department of State.

27. The United Nations News Centre on the United Nations website has also continued to demonstrate its growing usefulness to media and other audiences. The number of unique visits to the English site, for example, rose from some 355,000 in June and August 2004 to some 539,000 in the same period of 2005. Media outlets such as *Le Monde*, *The Guardian* (United Kingdom) and AllAfrica.com, regularly provide reverse links to the site, and United Nations News Service stories are consistently prominent in search results by Google News and Yahoo. Subscriptions to the daily e-mail news service rose by over 30 per cent over the course of 2005. In a survey, 72 per cent of subscribers gave the United Nations News Service the top two ratings for overall satisfaction.

Box 6

Subscribers to the daily e-mail news often serve as redisseminators. One such redisseminator wrote to DPI:

> "I forward your news articles concerning young people to 91 organizations in 57 countries involving over 2.5 million young people in Peaceways-Young General Assembly. Please keep me on your list."

28. Webcasting of United Nations meetings and events has also seen a sharp rise in use, by over 50 per cent in 2005, further broadening the Department's outreach in real time (see A/AC.198/2006/3).

Media training programme

29. The 2005 Reham al-Farra Memorial Journalists' Fellowship Programme, a training programme for junior media professionals from developing countries and countries with economies in transition, introduced a number of innovations to better reflect the Organization's priorities, in particular its partnerships with civil society organizations and educational sectors. The aim was to involve not only the Secretariat but also representatives of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations in briefings on such important topics as Security Council reform. For example, a senior Secretariat official and a permanent representative debated the impact of the 2005 World Summit on the agenda of the United Nations. The participants in 2005 also met with civil society representatives to hear about their role in supporting the work of the United Nations and attended the annual Department of Public Information/NGO conference. The participants were required to file stories on the Summit and on their visit to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in

Washington, D.C. The programme has trained a total of 372 journalists over the past 25 years.

E. Use of new technology

30. With both Web and digital technology transforming the delivery of news and information products, the adaptation and integration of new technology is at the core of the Department's news operations, in both production and modes of delivery. UNIFEED, a satellite delivery of news video, is just one example of the process of response to changing demands (see para. 52 below for additional information). Similarly, the growth in webcasting has shown the widening geographic range of the audience for the delivery of news in real time. Expansion of the service to permit delivery in floor and other languages is now under way.

31. The Department is similarly enhancing other web- and e-mail-based delivery systems for its text, audio and photo products and services, which have to be undertaken in conjunction with enhancements to the overall information technology infrastructure, including backup systems. It is working closely with the Information Technology Services Division in this regard, in particular as a result of the vulnerabilities in the existing delivery systems, which became evident in the power failure and consequent shut down of the electronic systems at Headquarters last September. One of the first efforts in this regard has been the technical enhancement of the e-mail news service, which will respond to subscribers' demands for improved customization and delivery options and will finally permit expansion of the service to official languages other than English and French. Further improvements are also planned for the delivery of audio and photos, the latter with the installation of a front-end web-based delivery system for Networked Interactive Content Access (NICA) for high-resolution photos, which again will help meet the request of clients for improved timeliness and easier access.

32. Internal production systems have also benefited from the introduction of new technology. The NICA (back-end) photo module was introduced in May 2004 and has increased productivity and improved internal efficiency by providing a central photo retrieval resource for all internal users. The NICA (back-end) photo module has also facilitated batch photo distribution to selected wire agencies. The "Radioman" module for United Nations Radio production was introduced on the heels of the NICA module. This was a far more complex system to implement, given the many information technology infrastructure challenges at Headquarters. Eighty-eight workstations link the system to United Nations Radio editorial offices, radio studios, audio library, a hub where audio is converted to data, and the Headquarters data centre. Major networking and configuration issues were resolved in the first half of 2005, and when the system is fully implemented with the on-air playback module, workflow in radio production and dissemination, as well as archiving, will be significantly streamlined. Web publishing will be automated and the benefit of having the audio clips as segments pre-positioned in the playlist will permit the Department to update its daily radio news programmes more often and more easily, as well as enable it to pursue the development of audio distribution via mobile devices, another new development with exciting potential to reach new and younger audiences.

33. The Department is also continuing the modernization of its broadcast infrastructure, in particular the conversion to digital technology, although the pace and scope of these efforts are constrained by continuing uncertainties over the precise timing and configurations for the capital master plan.

III. United Nations Radio

34. The fear that the introduction of new information and communication technologies would diminish the importance of traditional means of communication, such as radio, has proven to be unfounded. Instead, the integration of new technologies has broadened the scope of United Nations Radio broadcasts and expanded its outreach. The Department's radio and video programmes now reach an estimated total weekly audience of 599 million, according to a survey carried out by an independent expert. For radio alone, audience reach was close to 300 million a week for the programmes produced in the six official languages and Portuguese, and not counting listeners reached through satellite feeds. This is more than double the reach estimated in 2003 when a similar survey was conducted. The survey showed that the number of partner stations rose by over 20 per cent (see A/AC.198/2006/4).

35. In recent months, United Nations Radio has undertaken a number of special initiatives, including the production of a project, "60 Years in 60 Minutes", by the Russian language unit. The project included the production of 30 two-minute short stories covering major events in the history of the Organization based on archival sounds and actualities. In another project, also linked to the sixtieth anniversary of the Organization, the Chinese service organized an essay competition in conjunction with partner stations in Shanghai, Tianjin and Henan. Radio listeners were asked to send short essays, on the theme "The United Nations in my eyes". Of the tens of thousands of entries received, the stations selected six winning entries, recorded them in the writers' own voices and broadcast them on United Nations Radio. Radio Shanghai also had the winning entries serialized in a leading newspaper and compiled a souvenir compact disc.

Box 7

One of the winners of the radio essays in Chinese was a farmer who recalled having received United Nations aid in the late 1940s after the Yellow River had flooded. He wrote:

> "My aunt handed me a western-style coat, which was so big that it reached my knees. I jumped up and down with joy. 'It has come a long way, across the ocean from the United Nations,' my aunt told me."

36. In November 2005, United Nations Radio launched *UN Radio News/USA*, a new information service offering short daily news updates, feature reports and actualities for use in programmes produced locally. The service also provides access to complete and unedited audio of interviews, news conferences, meetings and speeches to allow journalists to cover United Nations issues and events from a local perspective. All audio materials are available for download in .mp3 format, free of

charge on the information service's dedicated website, http://radio.un.org/newsuse. Currently, the service has 131 registrants, including 14 radio networks, 28 radio stations and 15 content providers. Regular users include major networks such as Clear Channel News, Voice of America, Radio France Internationale, and Free Speech Radio News, as well as individual stations.

IV. Preservation of radio, video and photo archives

37. The photo and audio-visual archives of the United Nations are a unique treasure house and the Department is very much focused on meeting the challenge of preserving this legacy for the benefit of current and future audiences. The challenges include the appraisal and collection of records; access; preservation and restoration; disaster preparedness; and crucially, resources, on which all the other categories rely. The Department is working on a number of fronts. First, within existing resources, some 16,415 legacy photos have been ingested into the NICA system and work is under way to complete the ingestion of corresponding metadata to permit fast and easier access to those historical images. Second, the Department participated in the recent World Conference of the International Federation of Television Archives, where it launched an appeal to form a partnership with leading companies and organizations in the field of preservation and conservation and philanthropic groups, to provide technical guidance and assistance and to help raise funds for the preservation of the Organization's archives. The Department is presently working with the Federation to determine the best strategy and to identify the requirements for the preservation of the audio-visual archives. As an initial step, graduate students specializing in archival audio-visual preservation and restoration will be enlisted in the summer of 2006 to help prepare a baseline inventory of the items needing immediate treatment.

V. Publicizing the work and decisions of the General Assembly

A. Cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Office of the President of the General Assembly

38. The Department continued to seek additional ways to further publicize the work and decisions of the General Assembly and to strengthen its working relationship with the President of the Assembly. The Department appointed a spokesperson who had been working extensively on the lead-up campaign for the 2005 World Summit, in view of the President's emphasis on the negotiations as integral to the revitalization of the Assembly. The Department continued to loan an information assistant to work full-time with the Spokesperson for the President, thus providing back-up support and continuity in the flow of information to the media, especially needed in this period of intensive negotiations. The Department also provided ongoing support to updating the website providing information on the work of the President of the Assembly.

39. Coverage of the activities of the General Assembly and of the President of the Assembly was also significantly expanded. In addition to transmitting the statements of the Heads of State and Government to the national radio stations of the least developed countries during the General Debate, United Nations Radio

conducted interviews with a number of presidents, vice-presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers, including from Belarus, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Colombia, Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Paraguay, Portugal, the Sudan and Togo. The on-line NewsCentre also devoted numerous stories in media-friendly language to the work of the Assembly and its various Committees, drawing on the detailed summaries provided by the Department's daily press releases. *UN Chronicle* carried an extensive interview with the President of the Assembly in issue No. III (2005) and followed up with extensive coverage of the sixtieth session of the Assembly in issue No. IV (2005), covering the general debate, as well as discussions in Committees. The Department also gave the spotlight to the President of the Assembly at a number of outreach events, including the 2005 student conference on human rights, which focused on the right to water.

B. Coordination between the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General and the Department of Public Information

40. The Department worked closely with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, in particular the Office of the Spokesman, and with relevant substantive offices, to ensure clear, consistent and coordinated messaging and continued rapid response to misinformation in the media, including that concerning the decisions of the General Assembly. A daily, early morning meeting involving senior officials of the Department, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other offices, as necessary, ensures timely guidance for responses to breaking stories, as well as a forum for determining the strategic direction for wider messaging and other outreach efforts. Coordination is also reinforced through subsequent daily meetings between the operational staff of the Department and the Office of the Spokesman, again involving relevant substantive offices, as necessary, to ensure an accurate, up-to-date and consistent approach in the daily news output. In addition, the system of regular guidance to United Nations officials on key issues before the media, which proved so valuable in 2004, is being continued. The Department has also continued to provide dedicated resources to written responses to misinformation, to media placement work with senior officials and to assisting in the placement of op-ed articles by the Secretary-General and other officials in newspapers around the world. From June to December 2005, the Department was able to arrange a total of 227 op-ed placements in 63 countries.

VI. Role of the Department of Public Information in United Nations peacekeeping

41. In cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department completed two major guidance projects for the public information components of peacekeeping missions during the period under review, on the themes "Policy and guidance for public information in United Nations peacekeeping operations", which included 20 annexes, and "Standard operating procedures on public information activities on sexual exploitation and abuse". The first provides field operations with complete standard operating procedures for every aspect of implementing public information work in the field, while the second provides instructions to peacekeeping missions on how to communicate on related conduct and criminal allegations and issues. These guidance projects complement the skills

training, support and interaction between the Department and the public information components of peacekeeping missions and have resulted in delivering better services to media covering peacekeeping.

42. These efforts have begun to yield positive results. Media reports now increasingly speak of a robust presence of peacekeepers in some of the most difficult conflict zones. *The Economist* (United Kingdom), for example, headlined a December 2004 article on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, "The United Nations' hopeless force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". A year later, in an article entitled "A giant leap forward", the same magazine noted considerable progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and cited United Nations contributions to the historic December elections and to the calm atmosphere under which they were held.

43. The multifaceted role of United Nations peacekeeping was evident in the coverage of peacekeepers in Liberia and Sierra Leone. "As the 15,000-strong United Nations peacekeeping mission oversaw the landmark polls in Liberia", noted Reuters in December 2005, "residents in neighbouring Sierra Leone were starting to wave goodbye to their blue hats. ... The last contingent of United Nations peacekeepers left in December after six years, which saw them wrest control of a wild jungle terrain from rebel and militia fighters, restore government authority, and supervise elections."

Box 8

The successful completion of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) generated near universal accolades. The peacekeepers were greeted with headlines such as: "Peacekeepers plant hope in war-torn Sierra Leone" (*Toronto Star*), "Peacekeepers leave a calm Sierra Leone" (*The Guardian* (United Kingdom)), "Regretful farewell to blue helmets" (*The Mercury-South Africa*) and "Sierra Leone touted as success in war-torn continent" (Inter Press Service). CNN noted in its report that "UNAMSIL became recognized as a model for peacekeeping and reconstruction of police, army and public institutions ruined by years of war".

44. Much of the coverage was prompted by information provided by the Department in a comprehensive press packet and media outreach. Media around the world also made extensive use of photo images disseminated by the United Nations and the Associated Press, which were shot by a United Nations photographer dispatched by the Department from Liberia to Sierra Leone to cover the departing troops. The Department had strategized over the previous months, with the Mission and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, on how to bring maximum media attention to an operation that had achieved its mandate but had scant resources, personnel or international media remaining on the ground.

VII. Dialogue among civilizations

45. In its resolution 56/6, the General Assembly emphasized the need to acknowledge and respect the richness of all civilizations and to seek common ground among them in order to comprehensively address common challenges facing humanity. Working within the overall framework of this global agenda, the Department of Public Information continued to examine different manifestations of intolerance, exploring ways to promote respect and understanding among peoples and ways in which education can help overcome intolerance. Particularly notable is the "Unlearning Intolerance" seminar series, which has helped forge a broad coalition involving the members of the academic community, non-governmental organizations and interfaith movements. Four seminars have taken place thus far, focusing on anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, the role of "hate media", and combating genocide.

Box 9

Speaking on the value of the "Unlearning Intolerance" series, Benjamin Ferencz, a former Nuremberg Chief Prosecutor, recently said, "The United Nations seminars, 'Unlearning Intolerance', reflect the universal hope that, despite inbred misconceptions and fears, humanitarian goals are attainable."

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, head of the American Society for Muslim Advancement and a panellist in the seminar on Islamophobia, wrote: "In the current state of affairs, I see few things that are as important and relevant as this. I, myself, have continued my ongoing efforts toward the same goal."

46. Following the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 60/7 on holocaust remembrance, the Department organized the first International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, in January 2006, which included the launch of an annual lecture series on the theme "Remembrance and beyond", a film screening, a candlelight vigil, an exhibit and a briefing for non-governmental organizations. The Department's graphic designers created an evocative poster featuring barbed wire and a white flower as a symbol for the theme of the commemoration and the wider outreach programme. United Nations information offices worldwide were also involved in actively consulting and collaborating with local civil society partners to best reflect the spirit of Holocaust remembrance. As part of the outreach to interested partners worldwide, the Department launched a website on Holocaust remembrance, which provides background information and resources for use by Member States and civil society organizations that seek to develop Holocaust education programmes. A best practices symposium highlighting effective outreach tools and techniques on Holocaust remembrance and education and genocide prevention is planned for 2007.

Box 10

The network of United Nations information centres used the International Day of Peace to celebrate the unity and diversity of humankind in a variety of ways. Below are a few examples:

Harare: Peace procession, followed by prayers of peace offered by representatives of various religions and faith traditions.

Jakarta: Interactive dialogue on the United Nations and peace, and a theatrical and musical performance, as well as an interfaith prayer for peace, held in association with the Atmajaya Catholic University.

New Delhi: Dance-dialogue to promote peace and cultural diversity.

VIII. United Nations Communications Group

47. The United Nations Communications Group, now in its fifth year, has emerged as a strong unifying platform for dealing with common communications challenges facing the United Nations. The Group includes 39 communications offices drawn from the entire United Nations system of organizations, up from 29 in 2002, when the Group formally replaced the Joint United Nations Information Committee.

48. The United Nations Communications Group continues to use a variety of ways to achieve greater and more effective system-wide coordination, including regular brainstorming meetings at Headquarters, issue-based task forces and special projects. In 2005, the Communications Group held 29 such meetings and dealt with such complex issues as United Nations reform, the 2005 World Summit, the oil-for-food programme inquiry, the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the tsunami and earthquake disasters in South-East Asia and South Asia, the transition in Iraq and the nuclear programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Various senior United Nations officials have briefed the Communications Group, including the Secretary-General and several of his senior envoys. The annual meeting of the Communications Group, at the heads of information level, to be held at different venues around the world, in 2006 it will be hosted by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

Task forces

49. Currently, five task forces and/or working groups are active, two of which deal with United Nations system responses to the International Year of Sport and Physical Education, and the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015. The remaining task forces address the issues of membership in the United Nations Communications Group, the relationship of the United Nations with professional journalists and the distribution of United Nations photos.

50. The Working Group on Sports for Development and Peace is a good example of how the task forces function. Established in February 2005, the Working Group meets every two weeks to discuss coordination and cooperation so as to maximize the impact of sports activities and programmes throughout the United Nations

system and to avoid duplication. The members of the Working Group have joined efforts to draft a business plan, contribute to the report of the Secretary-General on sport for development and peace and regularly provide information and news for the United Nations Sport Bulletin, which is issued every two weeks and distributed throughout the United Nations system and among external partners. The Working Group is also identifying opportunities to link sport for development and peace with the worlds of culture and music to amplify the message of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

Special projects

51. A new Internet-based calendar of media events for the entire United Nations system (www.un.org/events/calendar) was launched in October 2005. The calendar, which serves as a unified platform for collecting and sharing information regarding meetings, conferences, launches of major reports and campaigns, as well as special events and exhibits, is proving to be a useful tool, helping United Nations Communications Group members to avoid duplication and overlap. Currently, 29 Communications Group members have designated focal points for providing input to the calendar on a regular basis.

52. UNIFEED, a satellite transmission service facilitating immediate access to the footage of the United Nations and its agencies and programmes, has fed more than 800 video news stories since its launch in March 2005. The service is being received by some 500 stations around the world, with such major broadcasters as Sky News, BBC, CNN and CCTV among the material. Since November 2005, the feed has been extended to Saturdays and now runs six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. Selected stories are also being distributed through the European Broadcasting Union to more than 60 television stations in Europe, the Middle East, North America and North Africa.

United Nations Communications Group at the country level

53. The success of the United Nations Communications Group is largely determined by its ability to coordinate activities at the country level. Over two thirds of the information centres currently lead efforts to coordinate the communications activities of the United Nations Country Team in one form or another. The formal creation of national communication groups could further strengthen such efforts. It was agreed at the fourth annual meeting of the Communications Group (23-24 May 2005, Geneva) that a basic operating model, which outlined principles guiding cooperation at the national level, would be developed. The paper, which was later finalized, in consultation with Communications Group members and the network of information centres, will be forwarded to the United Nations Development Group for its adoption and system-wide application.

IX. Conclusions

54. The principal task of the Department, as the public voice of the Organization, is to tell the United Nations story. In order to tell the story in a compelling manner and to the widest possible audience, it repositioned itself by identifying three strategic goals: maximizing the effectiveness of its communications work by

pursuing well-defined and targeted delivery of information products and activities, further exploiting ongoing advances in information and communication technologies, and expanding its grass-roots support base by building partnerships with civil society. Adopting a coordinated strategic communications approach that brought together all Department units, including its field offices, and the bodies and organizations of the United Nations system, the Department focused on the priority issues of the Organization. This prioritization was necessary not only to secure the greatest public impact but also to ensure the optimal use of ever-dwindling resources. As the present report demonstrates, the Department is now better placed than ever before to be the voice of the Organization and to communicate its stories to the widest possible audience.

55. Much thought has been given by Member States and the Secretariat in 2005 to better equipping the United Nations to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. Indeed, after the adoption of the Summit Outcome, the United Nations stands on the cusp of a new era. New mandates have been established and new priorities have been set. The Organization is undergoing a "time for renewal" — the Department's slogan for the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations.

56. During 2005, the Department has aimed to be innovative, creative, accountable and results-oriented. It has sought to fulfil its worldwide objectives with sorely limited resources and against the backdrop of a sometimes unfavourable environment. As the United Nations takes on the new mantle bestowed upon it by the world's leaders in September 2005, the Department stands ready to ensure that the Organization's work — new and old, unfinished and just beginning — is properly understood. With the support of the Committee on Information, the Department stands ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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Committee on Information
Twenty-eighth session
24 April-5 May 2006

Provisional agenda and annotations/programme of work

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Statement by the Chairman.
4. Admission of new members.
5. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.
6. General debate.
7. Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General.
8. Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day.
9. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.
10. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

Annotations/programme of work

24 April 2006

Opening of the session

The session will be opened by the Chairman of the Committee on Information.

Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

The provisional agenda has been prepared on the basis of consultations among the members of the Bureau of the Committee on Information.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman will address the Committee at its opening meeting.

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Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman will address the Committee at its opening meeting.

Admission of new members

The Committee will consider requests for membership in the Committee on Information.

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information will address the Committee at its opening meeting to provide an update on the activities of the Department and report on the implementation of the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolutions 60/109 A and B of 8 December 2005.

24-26 April 2006

General debate and consideration of substantive questions

Documentation

Report of the Secretary-General on continued rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres (A/AC.198/2006/1)

Report of the Secretary-General on the modernization and integrated management of United Nations libraries: update on new strategic directions (A/AC.198/2006/2)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations website: recent developments and progress towards parity among the official languages (A/AC.198/2006/3)

Report of the Secretary-General on assessing the effectiveness of United Nations public information products and activities: the results of a three-year evaluation project (A/AC.198/2006/4)

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information (A/AC.198/2006/5)

27 April-4 May 2006

Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information

The Secretariat will require a 48-hour period to process the draft report of the Committee in all official languages.

3 May 2006

Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day

The General Assembly, by its decision 48/432 of 20 December 1993, declared 3 May as World Press Freedom Day. The Department of Public Information will commemorate the Day with a panel discussion. Please note that this is not an official meeting of the Committee on Information.

9 May 2006

Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session

Notes

[1] The following wording for the sub-items of the general debate is based on General Assembly resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979:

(a) Promotion of the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communications order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information;

(b) Continuation of the examination of United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, and the need to establish the new international economic order and the new world information and communications order;

(c) Evaluation and follow-up of the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications.